APRIL 25c

Weird Tales

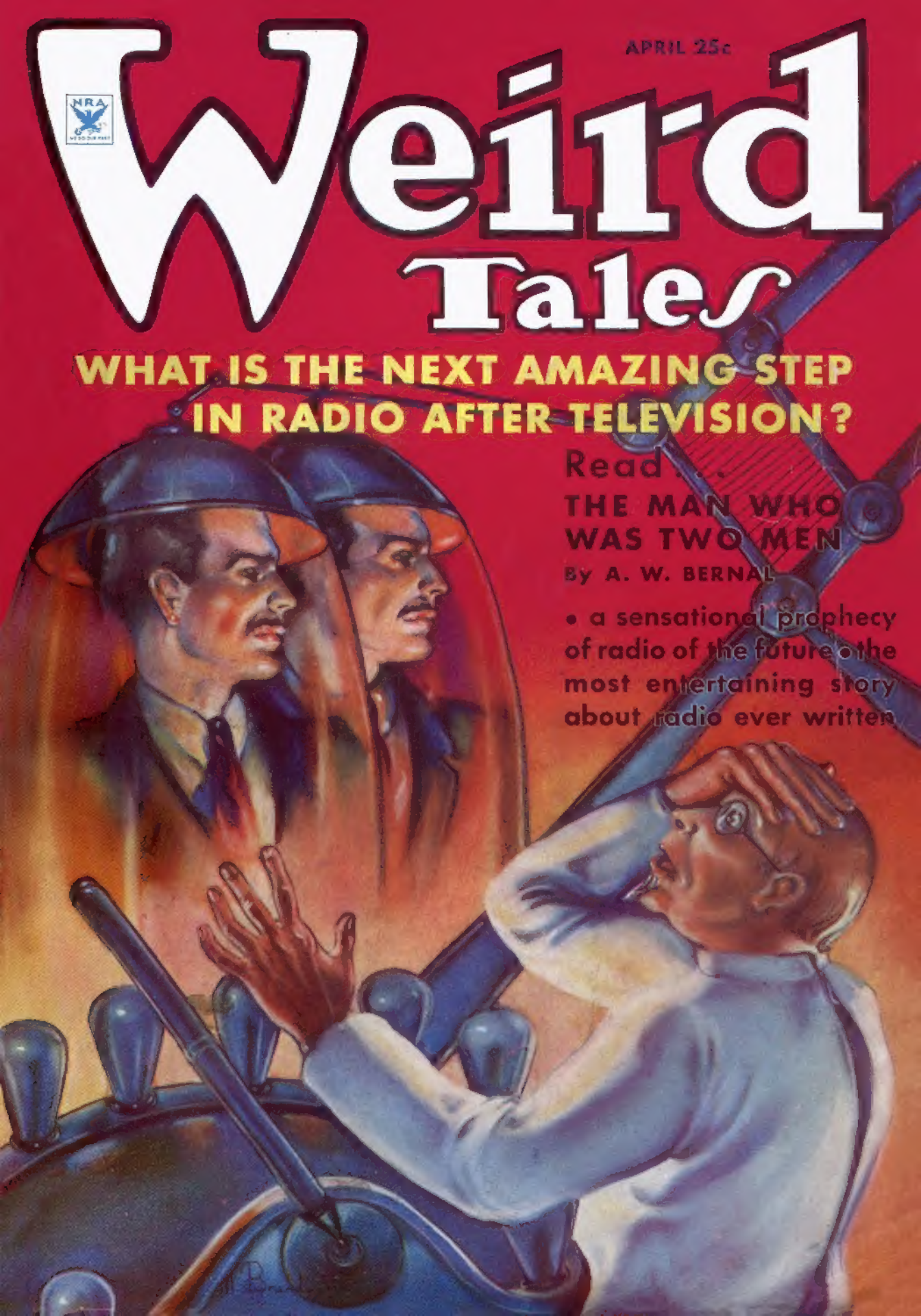
WHAT IS THE NEXT AMAZING STEP IN RADIO AFTER TELEVISION?

Read . . .

THE MAN WHO WAS TWO MEN

By A. W. BERNAL

• a sensational prophecy of radio of the future • the most entertaining story about radio ever written



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AGAIN —THE WORLD'S CHAMPIONSHIP

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL TYPING CONTEST

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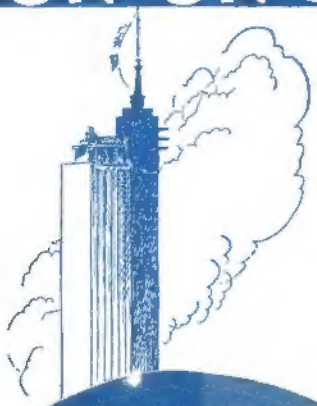

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MISS DOROTHY DOW
Declared World's Champion School Typist, 1933

Marie Thiem

1934 CHAMPION

INTERNATIONAL COMMERCIAL SCHOOLS CONTEST

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We congratulate Miss Thiem on her earned and well deserved honor.

1934

WHEN QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE WIN REPEATEDLY

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"The next moment the screaming scientist was helplessly enmeshed in a net of wiring."

The Man Who Was Two Men

By ARTHUR WILLIAM BERNAL

An amazing weird-scientific story that will hold your intense interest —probably the most entertaining story about radio ever written

"OH, I GUESS it does sound weird, doesn't it?" asked the man who was called Harry Preest.

I nodded acquiescence, watching his white teeth as they chewed nervously upon the ragged fringe of a black mustache. It sounded unutterably strange, even to me whose business it is to hear incredible narratives—to whom fantastic stories are everyday commonplaces. Yes, inured as I was to such ravings, I had now come across something which far

overshadowed all others I had ever heard.

"It—it's quite remarkable," I said without exaggeration; then I added, "for how long a time were you two separate men—one individual, living two distinct lives?"

The man called Harry Preest looked me straight in the eye and answered in a taut half-whisper, *"I still am!"*

The air was quite warm, yet I could not repress a sudden shudder.

"I see that you'd like to hear the whole story, wouldn't you?" went on the man called Harry Preest. "Well, all right, I don't mind telling a sympathetic person like you about it. You sit down here and make yourself comfortable," he motioned to the narrow bunk on which he slept, "and I'll tell you everything. No, I'll stand up; I talk better if I stroll up and down a bit as I speak."

As he cleared his throat as though preparing to make a long speech, I eased myself onto the bed he had indicated. I glanced up expectantly into his bright, restless eyes.

"All right," the man called Harry Preest said again, "but if I'm going to tell you this story I'm going to do it in my own way, in my own words, you understand. I don't wish to be interrupted till I'm all finished. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

The other began slowly to pace to and fro within the small room, while his eyes appeared to be searching the floor for the words he needed. "All right, now," he said. "Listen carefully to what I have to say."

The Amazing Dilemma of Harry Preest

HARRY PREEST, unemployed, seated on a bench in the park, was staring dolefully at two sparrows quarreling over a stale crust of bread. He had lost his job, and his hopes of soon getting another were fast paling. A discouraged sigh escaped his lips.

"I beg your pardon, my dear sir," remarked a high thin voice from beside him, unexpectedly, "but isn't your name Preest?"

Preest looked up. A slow smile of recognition chased the worried frown from his face as he beheld a plump little figure attired in a sport-back coat and rather tight-fitting, shiny, blue serge trousers.

"Doctor—Doctor Porthet!"

"Exactly," agreed the little man, jovially. "Doctor Emmett D. Porthet, at your service."

"Why, how are you, doctor? Won't you sit down?"

● Arthur William Bernal is a young author, yet he has already distinguished himself as a writer of fascinating science-fiction. His weird-scientific novel, "Vampires of the Moon," won enthusiastic acclaim when it was printed in Weird Tales a year ago. This young California author presents an amazing story of what might happen in the near future—a striking tale of the next forward step in radio after television. "The Man Who Was Two Men," published complete in this issue, is an intensely human story, presenting a very real dilemma. What would you do if you were suddenly changed by science into two men, each complete with the body, the brains, the emotions and the memory that you have now? This novelette tells in interest-gripping fashion how Harry Preest met that problem when a radio experiment split his personality into two identical beings. We recommend the story to you.

The paunchy little man in the tight pants carefully dusted off a portion of the bench and seated himself, his round face agleam with pleasure. "Well," he said pertly, at once, his eyes twinkling from behind octagonal lenses, "you, Harry Preest, are just the man I have been looking for. Have you any porcelain fillings in your mouth? No? Then, how would you like to earn one thousand dollars for a meager half-hour's work this evening?"

Preest's head jerked up as though he had been jabbed with a pin. "Uh? Say that again, doc!"

"I mean it," insisted Porthet seriously. He cast a bird-like glance over his shoulder to assure himself that no person was within hearing distance, then resumed in a low voice. "I have urgent need for a man's services tonight—a man who is willing to take a very little risk for a fat and satisfying sum of good round dollars. I ventured to this park especially to pick up some unemployed fellow who seemed trustworthy; but now that I have found you, my dear Mr. Preest, I feel my search is terminated."

"Risk, eh? Some experiment, doctor?"

"Exactly—an extremely significant experiment," pursued the smaller man importantly. "An experiment which will—if successful, and I give you my word that it can not fail—an experiment which will, I say, astound the universe and open up for mankind fields as yet undreamed of. Why, this discovery of mine, my dear——"

"But what about the thousand dollars?" put in Preest, his interest in the material considerably outweighing his curiosity in the scientific.

"Exactly—the thousand dollars. I was just coming to that," chirped the cherubic little man of science, wagging a fat forefinger beneath Preest's nose. "Well, Mr. Preest, as I have doubtless told you sometime during those dialogs of our previous acquaintance, the name of Porthet—or, more strictly speaking, the name of Emmett D. Porthet, Ph. D., F. R. S.—is one which ranks among those foremost on the honor rolls of science. You yourself are well aware of my accomplishments in such widely diversified fields as organic chemistry, medicine, and television, are you not?

"Now," this cherub of the scientific world tripped on, pausing only long enough to take breath, "in the past five years, I have run across several startling discoveries, all proceeding from my extensive work in the transmission of objects through space by means of electromagnetic impulses——"

"You mean radioing solids, don't you, doctor?" Preest interrupted.

"Exactly, my dear sir, exactly. But to the point. Never let it be said of Doctor Emmett Porthet that he dallies with excess verbiage when occasion demands expediency. Now, my dear sir, do you realize that you have the honor to be the very first to compliment me on my discovery of transmitting three-dimensional objects through empty space to resolidify them in a receiving-bowl as far away from the broadcasting unit as desirable?—that you are the first person to whom I have confided the fact that precisely one year ago this coming August, I—Emmett D. Porthet—accomplished the heretofore impossible feat of broadcasting a can of condensed vegetable soup from one part of my laboratory across some thirty feet of intervening space, to reassemble it *in toto* at the other end?

"You are surprized, my dear sir, you are astounded, are you not? Exactly. But that is not all. No, indeed. Is it like Doctor Porthet to be content to publish the results of so trifling an achievement before he had plunged deeper into the

problem—to its very crux, if you wish? Emphatically no, my dear Mr. Preest, emphatically no! Not Doctor Emmett D. Porthet!"

"But what's this about the thousand dollars?" Preest inserted hastily while the round-faced orator paused for his second wind.

"I am coming to that directly, my dear sir. As I was saying, a year ago I succeeded in transmitting an inanimate object through space and solids, to be completely reassembled, unharmed, at the receiving end of my laboratory unit. But that was only the beginning. Day after day I slaved like the martyr to science that I am, forging ever farther toward that gleaming goal which I had set for myself. And in my heart of hearts, my dear sir, I knew that the unfolding scrolls of time must eventually bring hard-earned but appropriate rewards to my genius."

"But what happened? Did you——"

"Exactly. At eight o'clock on the evening of April first, this year, I solved the difficult problem of disintegrating a chloroformed guinea-pig into its component pulsations, broadcast them helter-skelter through the air, picked up these invisible vibrations of organic matter in my receiving-unit, condensed them — *manière de dire*—and reintegrated the unconscious little hero of the animal world within the catching-bowl!"

A GLIMMER of uneasy suspicion was dawning in the mind of the worthy Porthet's audience of one. "You mean, doctor, that you *broadcast* a guinea-pig through a microphone and *tuned in* on him with a receiving-set across the room, as if he was a piece of *music?*" demanded Preest breathlessly. "What did he look like?—I mean, was there any static?"

"In answer to your first query, my dear sir," nodded the scientific cherub in agreement, "yes. Your somewhat inelegant terms rather inadequately describe the miracle which I on that occasion performed. The piglet was, as you suggest, broadcast a good deal after the manner of a musical note. Now, as to what he—poor little creature—looked like, that I was just coming to. In every lineament, eyes, ears, nose and whiskers—even in minuter details such as nerve-fibers and corpuscles—the brave little fellow was in flawless condition when I picked him up from the receiving-bowl at the conclusion of the experiment. That is, my dear Preest, ah, he was in absolutely flawless condition except for one thing—ah, he was, alas, deceased."

"Oh." There was a world of expression in that single syllable as uttered by Harry Preest.

"Yes, he was dead. *But*"—the chubby forefinger jumped into action once more—"I had conquered my invisible and relentless enemy, Nature, not only to the extent of reducing organic matter to mere vibration, but actually to the point of reintegrating those selfsame vibrations in exact order of their transmittance across the ether. Do you see, my dear Mr. Preest?"

"Yeah, I get it," said Mr. Preest. "He was perfectly O. K.—only he was dead!"

"But once again, sir, that was merely the beginning. Three short months later—two nights ago, to be more explicit, at precisely 11:45 p. m. Pacific Standard Time—I surmounted my final obstacle and learned how to disintegrate that unseen something, that bit of life-force, that divine spark called the soul, if you will, along with the rest of the animal and broadcast it, too, across empty space as an etheric impulse! Are you not astounded, Mr. Preest, to be talking thus informally to one so great as the brilliant Doctor Emmet Porthet—the man who broadcasts

living creatures as others transmit sounds and pictures?"

"Then two nights ago you sent and received a guinea-pig—*alive?*" asked Preest, in unbounded amazement.

"No," corrected the precise Porthet. "Alive, yes—but not a guinea-pig this time. No, my dear sir, two nights ago my faithful and courageous house-cat, Theresa, became an immortal in the corridors of scientific fame, when she leapt, in the form of darting vibration, from one end of my laboratory across more than thirty feet of thin air, safely into my receiving-bowl—alive and unharmed. Think of it! And in proof, my dear sir, just allow me to show you these," a plump pink wrist twisted itself from its sleeve to bare three fine, red scratches, where the ungrateful Theresa had plunged her feline finger-nails, in astonishment, no doubt, over her abrupt ride through the ether. "And now——"

"And now, about the thousand dollars?" asked Preest hopefully, raising his eyes from the wounds of this martyr to science.

"Exactly. Just what I was coming to. It is growing dark, and I am growing cold. I will dally no longer with history—and what I have been telling you *is* history, my dear Mr. Preest—but will advance without delay to the very heart of this matter which concerns us both so vitally. Very well, the thousand dollars. Now, as you are doubtless cognizant, I have amassed, through some modest contributions of mine in the field of true-color television, a small but tidy sum of profit—worldly recognition of my scientific endeavors, if you will.

"*Now,*" the glow of triumphant pink cheeks was matched by the answering gleam in the eyes of Harry Preest, "so anxious am I to complete my experiments—to tie up the final loose ends—as it were—I this night seek the services of some great hero who will volunteer to let me broadcast him through but thirty short feet of empty air! In appreciation of this timely aid, I will, besides not neglecting a mention of his full name in each and every newspaper account of my work, bestow upon this fortunate individual, without obligation, the handsomely generous amount of one thousand United States silver dollars or their equivalent in paper currency! What say you, Mr. Preest?"

PREEST stared through the gathering dusk at his beaming would-be benefactor without responding. A thousand dollars—cold cash! A thousand good round cartwheels in a time of need! Ah, that *was* something. But—to be broadcast through space? Reduced to mere vibrations—*broadcast?* That also was something. Something to be wary of.

"Uh—well," began Preest. "Great Scott, doctor—I don't know about this. I—could I—uh——"

"Exactly," chirped the portly Porthet with a snap of the fingers. "Exactly. You wish a demonstration. You, who are about to brave the Great Unknown in the worthy cause of science—you, who are about to become the first human to dare complete disintegration of your earthly body—you, I say, desire a trial test, do you not? I compliment you, my dear Mr. Preest, upon your sagacity and good judgment. Your sagacity in wishing to view a trial demonstration, and your good judgment in expressing yourself so unselfishly willing to dare to do for the great god Science, my dear sir!"

"Whoa," demurred Preest as the other rose and clutched him firmly by one arm. "I didn't say——"

"Tut, tut, my dear sir," the genius in tight pants cut him off with superb nonchalance, "none of your thanks to me for

singling out a mere average man like you for so great an opportunity as this. No indeed, Emmett Porthet seeks not praise from any man for his greatest deeds. Come, my dear sir, let us visit my humble house of science."

Preest reluctantly allowed himself to be dragged from the park, while his gracious benefactor showered upon him a brilliant monolog of verbal gems.

Harry Preest gnawed the fringe of his mustache helplessly, and gazed in bewilderment at the intricate mazes of wires, tubes, and dials heaped about him in seemingly endless profusion. In all the vast space of a thirty-foot room there appeared to be no single area in which one might move about, unless he risked entanglement in some mysterious mound of scientific paraphernalia. Preest understood now for the first time how the paunchy little Porthet could keep half a dozen experiments going simultaneously. He also observed that being broadcast in the form of vibrations seemed to be about the only possible method to journey across the wire jungle on the floor, unless perhaps the worthy doctor made use of some sort of road map to make the precarious trip.

Preest, wading through a mass of apparently useless things in what might in ordinary quarters be termed a junk-heap, doubtfully eyed a massive panel studded with various-colored signal bulbs and enough nickeled levers and switches to control every railroad in the world.

"Doctor Porthet," he pleaded eventually, "please don't make any more speeches tonight—but can you tell me what all this stuff is about?"

Porthet chuckled proudly. "Brush those coils off that bench over there and be seated. But do not touch anything, I warn you, because I have several delicate connections which might easily be jerked loose by a careless foot, spoiling a life's work. I shall explain the—the dimensional-transmission equipment in a moment, but right now I must retrieve that fearless veteran of countless experiments, Theresa. Here kitty, kitty."

Preest marveled at the dexterous manner in which the chubby Porthet crept in and out among the tentacles on the floor in pursuit of the bashful Theresa. But the dauntless little experimenter was not to be trifled with, and he finally emerged triumphantly from beneath a table with a lei of copper wire dangling from his neck and a shrilly protesting Persian cat in his arms.

"When does the charming Mrs. Preest expect you home?" inquired the scientist, thrusting the unwilling Theresa into his visitor's lap while he donned a once white laboratory apron.

"Oh, we just ate, and the wife went to the movies with her sister. Not for hours yet." Preest batted a few fluffs of cat fur away from his face as he answered.

"THERE we are," remarked Porthet as he enclosed the rapidly shedding Theresa in a small wire cage and stood her in a shallow porcelain receptacle on the floor. "Now, my dear sir, how much of this material," he waved a pink hand at the wild disarray surrounding the mewing Theresa, "is familiar to you?"

"Well," somewhat falteringly, "that thing there is some sort of a tube—looks like a kind of X-ray machine. And over there is a wire leading to this bell-like thing up here, which looks as if it might be an air-purifier or something, and Theresa is sitting in a porcelain bowl, and up on top there is some kind of new-fangled aerial——"

"Alas!" bemoaned the eminent Porthet, pursing his lips in sorrow. "I see that your scientific education has been sadly

neglected. Well, my dear sir, just what is your knowledge on the subject of radio transmission?"

"Why, of course, I—I'm in favor of it; I suppose it's been very useful in——"

"No, no, my dear Mr. Preest. To put my meaning in more precise words: just how complete is your knowledge of what occurs in a radio studio when a program is broadcast?"

"Oh, you mean *that!* Well, all I know is that, say, when a man sings, the sound of his voice is changed to some kind of impulses called radio waves, and that these waves travel with the speed of light and spread in all directions at once like big bubbles issuing from the station. Then, when those waves strike an aerial, they travel down it to the receiving-set, are changed back again to sound waves by the tubes and things, and come out of the speaker just as they sounded before they were picked up by the microphone in the studio. I guess that's about all."

"I see. How very unfortunate!" mused the cherub of science regretfully. "That rather complicates matters for me in any attempted explanation of my marvelous invention here. Oh, well. Anyway, my dear sir, allow me to inform you of these few simple facts. If you had a fuller understanding of the man-made miracle of radio broadcasting, you would find it immeasurably easier to grasp the gist of what I am driving at. For this machine I have created operates on almost exactly the same fundamental principles, you see.

"But first, my friend," the semaphoric pink digit was at work again, waving itself beneath the generous nose of the attentive Harry Preest, "heed you this. All matter, I have found, is nothing more nor less than varying combinations and types of etheric vibrations—to put it crudely, so that you may understand me. Every existing thing—metal, flesh or vegetable—can be shaken down in such a manner by certain periodic, rhythmic vibrations of tremendous velocity that it will rapidly assume its basic form—etheric impulses. You have no doubt heard that it is possible for certain sounds—vibrations, that is—emitted by the violin to completely shatter a glass vase or a window-pane in the room in which it is played. Well, that is the first step in the process which I have so rudely outlined to you.

"Now this," the dapper little gentleman pointed grandly to the apparatus which Preest had likened to an X-ray machine, "sends forth a bombardment of certain high-frequency rays which, when they impinge upon the atomic structure of a material object, set up that specific rhythm among its component electrons, which I mentioned, until that atomic structure breaks down completely under the influence of its internal disturbance, is disintegrated, if you will, till naught remains within that porcelain bowl but pulsing vibrations—the raw stuff from which matter is built. Do you follow me? Watch!"

A careful scrutiny of dials and a setting of shining levers; then the bespectacled Porthet plunged home a master switch on the broad paneling beside him. The drone and whine of tremendous dynamos sounded in Preest's ears, and as the long room began trembling gently beneath their powerful purr, he paled slightly, wondering uneasily if the entire laboratory were liable to slip into that "raw stuff from which matter is built."

But nothing unusual occurred — at least, not at that moment. Doctor Porthet pottered about the bulbous glass tube, making several adjustments in a mechanism at its base, and finally trained it on the metal cage and its terrified Persian contents.

"Piling up a good deal of voltage for

this machine, my dear sir," smiled the round-faced gentleman while he removed and meticulously polished his glasses with a silken handkerchief.

Preest stared without comment.

"All right, sir. Are we ready now?" the cherub chirped at last and stepped behind the thick protective shield in back of the monstrous tube. Preest made haste to follow. "Now, sir, if you will just keep an eye on Theresa there, you will soon witness a spectacle that will be worth writing to one's home about, as they say in the vernacular, eh, my dear Mr. Preest?"

"Go on," urged that individual, consumed by curiosity, "let's see the thing work."

"Right you are, my dear sir. There. Just look at that!" Chubby fingers worked buttons and switches.

Of a sudden a lurid, bristling purple glare was emitted by the angrily glowing tube, its eery light converging upon and completely engulfing the lunette of porcelain that held the crouching cat and her tiny prison. In breathless fascination Preest gaped, wide-eyed, while great sparks of blue-white flame writhed noisily about the lower edges of the sending-bowl.

Theresa, every hair on her body erect with rage and fright, was frantically mewing her protest against being reduced to a mere etheric disturbance.

"Hush, Theresa," cautioned her master with severity, "you are spoiling the experiment."

Theresa's lithe body began to quiver under the flood of mystic purple light. She looked suddenly very ill. Abruptly Preest sucked in his breath. Theresa, purpler than ever and caterwauling discordantly, was beginning to get a trifle blurry of outline, like a moving-picture which had accidentally slipped out of focus. In another moment the animal began to grow semi-transparent and her crouching form trembled violently into an extremely hazy indistinctness. Then, right before Preest's startled eyes, Theresa—not without visible reluctance, it must be admitted—slowly melted out of sight!

"THERE, you see?" The cherub of science was elated. "We have now completed the most difficult portion of our experiment. Naught remains of the little Theresa but a shimmer of vibration."

What he said was true. Theresa as a personality was quite gone, and in her place within the glistening porcelain shell, where the snapping purple glow bathed it with its weird sheen, was a huddle of hazy pulsations, reminding Harry Preest of those heat undulations which rise from a desert on a blistering day. Of the cat's cage, also, there was no trace.

"Wha—what happens now?" demanded Preest as soon as he had accustomed himself to the uncanny vision in the sending-bowl. He glanced inquiringly at Porthet's beaming face, which in the dazzling reflection of the purple glare, looked something like the full moon over fairyland.

"Exactly. What happens now, you ask," glibly supplied the worthy Porthet, wagging his plump finger to punctuate his remarks. "Well, my dear sir, that," the cherub indicated a queerly glowing metal grid ensconced within the bell-shaped hood above the sending-bowl, "is what corresponds to the microphone in the customary broadcasting-studio. It is what might be termed as something of a dimensional-microphone: one for the purpose of picking up the basic vibrations of a physical object, just as a regulation microphone picks up the vibrations of sound—and a very pretty bit of work I did on it too, I may remark, *en passant*.

"But to press on. Now, when musical notes are produced in a broadcasting-studio, what happens to them? I shall inform you, briefly. Those notes are a disturbance in the atmosphere—a series of pressures against the air, so to speak—which, in traveling outward from their source, encounter a properly stationed microphone and are then transposed from an air pressure to an electrical pressure. Wires now receive these electrical impulses and carry them to apparatus transforming them into electromagnetic waves, which the sending-antenna next radiates into space in all directions. With the amazing speed of light they now leap across great distances of void until they are collected by a receiving-antenna and are re-formed into electrical impulses inside a wire, once more. These wires connect with the set, and therein the loud-speaker finally reconverts the electric signals into sounds which are interpreted by the human ear as music.

"Very well. At the closing of this switch here upon which I have my hand, something very similar to what I have just related will occur to the pulsing vibrations of valiant little Theresa, there in the porcelain bowl. To be explicit, when this switch makes contact, that grid up there will create a—a vibrational suction, if you will allow the employment of such an inadequate term — a vibrational suction which will cause it to absorb within itself the component vibrations of Theresa, together with those of her imprisoning cage. So!"

The plump wizard plunged home the indicated switch, and Theresa's handful of component vibrations were swept upward, to vanish in the hooded grid like a cloud of dust drawn inside a vacuum cleaner.

"Now," continued Porthet proudly, "when the object's vibrations have been sucked—if you'll excuse the vulgarity of the expression, my dear Mr. Preest—sucked, I say, into the grid, they are immediately translated into electrical impulses and are thus rendered ready for instant release as electromagnetic radio waves."

"Are they broadcast in all directions—like a bubble?" demanded Preest confusedly.

"Exactly, my dear Mr. Preest. Exactly the term for it—hurled outward in all directions like an expanding bubble! And now, follow me, if you please, across the laboratory to the receiving-bowl, where we shall fling Theresa to the winds, as it were; and then reintegrate the brave little creature after she has traveled in the form of etheric impulses across thirty feet of space. Come."

Preest held his breath and made himself as narrow as possible while the two threaded their precarious way through the jungle of wire, down between walls of high-piled scientific apparatus.

The receiving-bowl, as far as Preest could determine, was almost a duplicate of the sending-unit. Voicing this observation, he received an answer in the affirmative.

"Exactly. This, the reintegrator, simply acts in the same manner as the sending-bowl, only it is operated in reverse ratio. And, of course, there is no vibratory ray needed at this end of the mechanism. Further, as you can not see by casual inspection, in the grid above a translator, or condenser of component vibrations, is so situated as to focus upon the center of the porcelain shell below. This I have cleverly arranged so that it will operate concurrently with the receiving-apparatus, and so, as fast as the vibrations are received they are built up into matter in the bowl. Are there any other questions?"

"Well, this thing over here—what is it?" pondered Preest. "It looks the same as the reintegrator to me."

"And that is exactly what it is. I was just coming to that. The other is a spare receiver, as it were; but of late I have been having no trouble at all with this one and so, of course, there has been no need of it. Be careful not to touch any of its switches, although I hardly think it is being supplied with current at present, anyway. But now, watch here carefully."

Porthet pulled back the lever which sent the receiving-bowl into silent readiness. A second later, as he plunged home the sending-switch that would release Theresa's vibrations and whiz them through space, there followed an ear-splitting crackle of sound like the crash of lightning. The deafening roar subsided almost at once, and scarcely had the thunderous reverberations died away, when Theresa and her cage sprang into abrupt existence in the lunette of gleaming porcelain.

"Why, she *is* reintegrated—or whatever it is!" cried Preest excitedly.

"Of course." There was not a trace of offense in the gracious Porthet's tones at that insinuating remark from his visitor. "Reintegrated. Exactly."

Doctor Porthet wheezed painfully as he stooped to free Theresa from her distasteful bondage. "Nobly done, my brave little kitten," he complimented as he released the catch on the cage door. Theresa quickly sprang out and scurried from sight among a nest of boxes. Porthet carefully set the empty cage away on a high shelf.

"Man, that's — that's colossal!" exclaimed the admiring Preest, but the scientific cherub, glowing like a happy infant, waved a deprecatory hand.

"Tut, my dear fellow," the portly Porthet beamed with charming modesty. "Just another tiny cog in the vast mechanism of service which I am for ever building for humanity's use. But, my dear Mr. Preest, since you have eaten already and I have not, will you allow me a brief respite to prepare a hasty snack so that I may alleviate the unwelcome pangs of hunger? Then, after I have partaken of prandial nourishment, we shall transact our little business. All I need to complete my experiment is the successful transmission and reintegration of a living human!"

"Oh, but——" protested Preest uncertainly.

"Tut, tut," the cherub in tight pants remonstrated gently. "I know how eager you must be to perform the journey through the ether, but let us wait until a poor old man has partaken of adequate refreshment. Now, not another word . . . not a word. Excuse me, please."

WHILE the rotund Porthet prepared a meal from his stock of canned goods, Preest roved thoughtfully about the crowded room investigating the "dimensional transmitter" at close range. Porthet had been careful to shut down the power so that no inadvertent twisting of dials or nudging of levers could cause any mishap. While Preest examined the various curious units of the remarkable invention, he mulled over in his mind the generous offer of the inventor-host.

It was horrible to contemplate what might happen if his vibrations got meshed in the gears or something, should he volunteer for the experiment. Yet a thousand dollars was a lot of money and such a vast sum would come in mighty handy at present. But being reduced to *vibration*—broadcast through the air like a cooking-recipe! Well, a thousand simoleons couldn't be earned without *some* effort—some risk. And after all, what was there

to be so greatly feared? The trip lasted only half a dozen seconds, and Theresa had made it twice now with apparently no ill effects. However, suppose anything did go wrong! A thousand dollars, though . . .

By the time the good doctor had completed his supper, Harry Preest had formed his decision. In response to the scientist's inquiry about his readiness to proceed at once with "their little business," he was able to make unhesitating reply.

"O. K., doc, sold! Let's get at it, before I come to and back out. Do I take off my clothes?"

"No, my dear sir," said Porthet happily. "Removal of your clothes will not be necessary. There on that table will be the thousand dollars, and here is a pen and an agreement. Just sign here on the dotted line, and our little compact is sealed."

"What's this thing I'm signing?" asked Preest, eyes glued to the enticing stack of greenbacks which the chubby genius was transferring from his safe.

"Just a mere matter of form, my dear Mr. Preest," smiled the doctor disarmingly as he pocketed the document in question. "A little agreement to the effect that if any untoward accident should befall either of us during the course of the experiment, the other shall not be held responsible for it. Mainly for your own protection, Mr. Preest, don't you see?"

"Yes, I see," said Preest, who did nothing of the sort. "Now, anything else?"

"Oh, yes! You say you have no porcelain fillings in your mouth—and how about a watch? The vibratory beam is adjusted so as not to affect porcelain or glass, you see."

"Nope, no porcelain; only silver and a speck of gold. No watch either—Uncle Benny's got that! Let's get going, eh? I'm getting nervous."

"Nothing to get nervous about, I assure you," chided Porthet, inspecting one of the two receiving-bowls and preparing it for use. "Look at me—I've got my entire scientific goal at stake—yet *I'm* not the least bit nervous. Ah, now if you will be so kind as to step this way, we shall soon be at the thing."

As if to prove that the temerarious wizard was not shaky in the slightest degree, he whistled cheerfully as he primed the sending-unit for its ultimate triumph. Trembling, but buoyed up by the cheery sight of the crisp, cool heap of currency, Preest plucked impatiently at his mustache and shifted dubiously from one foot to the other while he watched.

A minute later, the chipper Doctor Porthet straightened up with a sigh. He uttered a low, middle-aged chuckle of satisfaction. The great experiment was about to begin.

Harry Preest's teeth were chattering, but he manfully stepped over the edge of the porcelain shell and stood upright in the sending-bowl. He felt very silly, and not a little panic-stricken. His head, he found, just fitted nicely beneath the grid and was shrouded completely by the protective hood suspended over it.

"All right, my dear sir," glowed the genius with the paunch. "I think we are ready to commence, are we not?"

"Oh, ah—wait a minute," Preest's stammered retort was muffled sepulchrally by the great hood about his head. "Let's not—not be too hasty, Porthet. I——"

"Tut, tut. Nonsense, my dear Mr. Preest," piped Porthet, then added dramatically, "Remember, it is for science—and a thousand dollars!"

Preest gulped. "I—I guess I'm ready now," he choked hurriedly, thinking hard

of the neat stack of greenbacks on the table. "Let's go—quick!"

"Right you are, my dear sir. *Now!*"

WITH the drone of dynamos throbbing heavily in his ears, Preest did not hear the clicking of the switch which operated the giant bulb, whose vibratory impulses were to disrupt his entire atomic structure. But he winced a trifle and a tingling sensation skipped down his spine as, amid a sputter and crackle of sparks, the lurid purple glare drenched his frame with its mystic forces.

No sooner had the eery glimmer of light swirled hungrily over him than Harry Preest felt as though he were being given a swift ride on the hand-grip of a super-riveting gun. This terrible jarring sensation persisted for less than ten seconds; then the torturing twinge and jolt upscaled gradually into a high-pitched jerky buzz that paralyzed every cell in his body and set his teeth on edge like the harsh scrape of knife across frying-pan. He knew not how long he jounced and jittered under this awful strain before, with an abrupt suddenness that swept away all consciousness, a maelstrom of vibration descended upon him as though all the forces of evil had been unleashed within his boiling blood. The last thing Harry Preest remembered was the jangle of a billion billion whirling dental drills grinding away at the trembling rims of each red corpuscle in his circulatory system. Then it was over.

His clenched teeth relaxed and he sucked in a long, quivering breath. Henceforth he knew there would always be a bond of sympathy between him and Theresa, the purple kitten. For a brief second, vertigo seized him; then the nausea ebbed speedily and the man who had been reintegrated opened his eyes.

He was standing in the receiving-bowl, stiff as a wooden Indian, with his head in the confines of the grid-hood. Cautiously, so as not to damage anything about him, he ducked slightly and peered, first, down the long length of room across which he had so mysteriously traveled, then at the round face of the portly Porthet who stood, hand on lever, staring in his direction.

But Preest's reassuring smile froze on his lips, for Porthet, his eyes like huge black buttons in a white soup plate, was not looking at him, but at something beyond. And that something beyond held more than a soup-plateful of terror for the rotund genius.

Slowly, color drained back into the full-moon face until it shone with a rich-hued purple surpassing that emitted by the wonderful glass bulb at the opposite end of the room. Preest watched in horror, tensing himself for the moment when Porthet's flushed features would vanish with the pop of a punctured balloon. Then Porthet spoke.

"Ug—wuh," he exclaimed eloquently, pointing a palsied pink forefinger at something over Preest's left shoulder. Preest faced puzzledly about, and nearly jumped backward through the laboratory wall in sheer amazement at what he saw.

There, standing bewilderedly in the spare receiving-bowl, was Harry Preest, himself!

FOR a sickening instant each man gaped agonizedly at the apparition that faced him; then each ducked his head to see whose body he was wearing.

"Ug—wuh," gasped the purpling Porthet once again.

Harry Preest Number One, after satisfying himself that he was seemingly in his customary body and not in the least flocculent or shedding fluffs of cat fur, groped for and found his voice.

"That—that man," he stuttered hoarsely, "that other man—who is he?"

"Ug—wuh," reiterated Porthet for the third time, and noiselessly champed his jaws as though he were making a soundless after-dinner talk.

Then Harry Preest Number Two discovered that his vocal cords had been safely tucked into their proper place by the efficient reintegrator.

"Hey, doc, who *is* this guy?" he demanded.

"Oh dear, oh dear," wailed the pink-cheeked inventor at last, but without clarifying his previous statement; "oh dear, oh dear!"

"Well, doctor, what does this mean?" insisted Preest One, upon learning that Porthet was again employing the English language.

"Yes, Porthet, what is this?" inquired Preest Two like an echo to his fellow's query.

"This is—oh, this is terrible!" elucidated the frantic scientist and collapsed weakly into a chair. There was the pop and jangle of bursting tubes as he sank down upon the pile of apparatus the chair contained, but he heeded it not. "I knew I should have installed some sort of a directional beam device," he groaned miserably.

At this juncture, Theresa the cat, previously sulking in a corner but now evidently recovered from her gross misuse, began strolling leisurely out from under a table, approaching the stage of this portentous drama. Suddenly Theresa caught sight of the pair of perplexed Preests. Instantly her aristocratic back arched in wild astonishment like a human eyebrow and her tail plumed into pugilistic thickness. *"Pfffit!"* she exclaimed and scampered madly through the open window to the alley below.

"Well, Doctor Porthet," chorused the Preest couple in identical accents, "what is this all about?"

Startled at the sound of their measured voices, the duo transfixed each other with piercing glances. Preest One caught himself glaring at his own ireful phiz like a man making faces at himself in the mirror. Preest Two gnawed the fringe of his mustache in nervous resentment.

"Why, my dear sirs," cried the appalled Porthet after an ominous silence, "don't you see? One of you has been dematerialized and then reintegrated *twice!*"

"What!" The two exclamations met and blended perfectly.

"Exactly," Porthet hastened on. "Somebody tampered with the master switch of the spare receiver and turned it on. And of course, when I broadcast the component vibrations of the original Harry Preest, it naturally tuned in on them also. Now, which of you two men is responsible for this?"

"Well, I was fooling with the spare receiver——" began Preest One.

"——but you told me that it wasn't plugged into the circuit," finished Preest Two.

"Yes, yes," groaned the inventor sadly, "I suppose it is mainly my fault for not making sure that there was only one receiving-bowl functioning at the instant of broadcasting. Alas, the horror of it all!"

"You've got to get rid of him, then, somehow," ejaculated the two Preests together, each jabbing a thumb in the direction of the other.

"Wait a minute, my dear sirs," begged the chagrined cherub despairingly. "We won't get anywhere this way. Attend, please. Now, which of you is the spurious Mr. Preest?"

Silence.

"Come now, gentlemen, one of you speak up. Which of you is Mr. Preest under false pretenses?"

"*He* is!" agreed both in perfect synchronization.

Again silence. The two Preests eyed each other suspiciously; Porthet mopped at his pink forehead with a silk handkerchief.

"Wait a second——" commenced Preest One.

"——Let's do this thing right," ended Preest Two.

Porthet nodded feebly. "Yes, gentlemen, let us do this thing right, by all means."

"All right, now," Preest One cleared his throat in a business-like manner and turned toward his mate. "We'll start this way. Tell us just who you are."

"Well, I'm Harry Cornelius Preest," stated Preest Two simply and directly. "Who are *you?*"

"But you can't be. *I'm* Harry Preest!" protested the other strenuously.

Preest Two tossed his head in impatience.

"Now, gentlemen, gentlemen," hastily interrupted Porthet before the inevitable argument could get further under way. "Heed my explanations. This situation is graver than it seems. *Both* of you are the real Mr. Preest. . . ."

"What!" shrieked the pair of reintegrated men in unison.

"Exactly, gentlemen, exactly. Each of——"

"But how?—what?—why?——"

"I was just coming to that, my dear sirs," Porthet continued uneasily. "You see, in order to transmit your component vibrations from one point in space to another, it is necessary to alter them before hurling them forth from the sending-grid—as I explained before. So, although there was originally but one of you reduced to vibrational form, the wave that carried you across the laboratory radiated from the sending-grid in an infinite number of directions, in the same manner as a transmitted musical chime. Had there been a hundred receiving-bowls about the place, there would now be a hundred real Harry Preests. Do you comprehend?"

"That's something to be thankful for, at any rate," offered Preest One.

"Then he and I are both absolutely genuine?" queried Preest Two.

"Exactly, my dear Mr. Preest. Each and every single cell—every little gene and tiny chromosome in one of your bodies is duplicated without a single exception in the corresponding place in the body of the other. Your brain is his brain—his heart is your heart. Do you follow me?"

"But that's impossible!" put in Preest One angrily. "We can't be two people at the same time. It's not right!"

"No," agreed the other emphatically, "and two people can't be a single person at any time. That's not right, either!"

THE cherub of science thought a moment.

"Well, you are not actually one individual," he supplied uncertainly. "You are two distinct entities, but—well—his ideas are your ideas, and his memory is your memory at this moment; but from now on each of you will, of course, pile up individual experiences for yourselves. It will be rather like the same man being in two different places at once, although naturally the experiences of the one can not interfere with, or in any way affect, the experiences of the other."

"But that's impossible!" stoutly insisted Preest One.

"Oh yeah!" Preest Two inserted sarcastically. "Then how come you're standing over there, while I'm standing over here at the same time? Answer me that."

But Preest One was in no mood for riddles. "I don't care," he persisted, eyes

narrowing with determination. "I'm Harry Preest. I know I am—and I can prove I am! See here, see this scar on my wrist? That will identify me beyond the shadow of a doubt. Two years ago I and my brother-in-law were out——"

"——out hunting in the mountains," concluded Preest Two without hesitation, "and you fell down an embankment and slashed your left wrist. I know all about it. I ought to—I was there! See, there's the proof. Take a look at that scar."

"Why, you dirty impostor! You——" ground out Preest One excitedly.

"Listen to me, you big tramp!" cut in the other in equal wrath. "If anyone is an impostor, it's you—and you know it! And I'm——"

"My dear sirs," came Porthet's nervous voice above the ensuing clamor. "You shouldn't say those nasty things about each other. It merely amounts to casting ugly reflections on your own parentage, when you do."

"You're right," acquiesced Preest One shamefacedly. "I am only calling my own self names."

His *alter ego* vouchsafed no comment but subsided into a glowing silence.

Thereupon followed a short lull in hostilities while the miserable two seated themselves, at Porthet's request, to think things out in a logical manner. Both Preests inadvertently chewed musingly upon the hirsute growths adorning their upper lips, until each happened to glance guiltily at the other simultaneously. Caught in the act, the twins immediately ceased, and frowned sourly at their respective feet.

"There is only one way out of this terrible *impasse,* as far as I can see," sighed the portly Porthet eventually, "and that is to eliminate one of you."

"Eliminate him? How?" spoke the synchronized two together.

"I was just coming to that, my dear Mr. Preest," the scientist diplomatically addressed them both by their common title. "One of you must re-enter the sending-bowl to be reduced to his component vibrations and broadcast through the air —*but*—he will not be reintegrated again! Instead, the eliminated individual will simply speed onward for all eternity in vibrational form, painlessly and senselessly—till the suns themselves grow cold."

"Senselessly is right," growled one of the Preests. "Which is the poor dope who's going to consent to do the vanishing act for us? Him?"

"That, of course, my dear sirs, is the great stumbling-block. However, I see no other way. Is there one?"

"Listen, Harry," remarked one Preest seriously, "Porthet's right. We're both in an awful jam as long as there's two Preests running around loose. One of us has got to disappear."

"Yeah," grunted the other, a trifle embarrassed at finding himself engaged in conversation with himself, "guess you just about hit it. But which one of us has got to go? I won't—will you?"

The other Preest shook his head in silent negative.

"Well, gentlemen," said Porthet the portly, "we can—although I may say such a distasteful thing goes wholly against my grain—we can, I say, gamble on it. I will admit that this is a very serious matter to be decided by the whims of fickle Fancy, but unethical as it is, we can draw lots to see——"

"Wait!" One of the Preest's eyes gleamed triumphantly. "Listen, doctor," he said hurriedly, buttonholing that worthy, "here is the logical method of deciding which one of us is to be disintegrated again. When you began this experiment, you had in mind but one reintegration of Harry Preest, did you not?

Exact—uh, of course you did. All right, then. The fellow who was received by the *spare* receiving-set is the *spare* man! See?"

"Exactly!" A cheery smile wreathed the rosy cheeks of the diminutive scientific giant. "Right you are, my dear sir. The Harry Preest who was materialized in the wrong reintegrator is the one who should undoubtedly be reduced back into his component vibrations! This time, my dear sirs, it will be a simple matter to locate the spurious Mr. Preest. Now, which one of you is the—ah, authentic one?"

"Ah—see there?" exulted the first Preest. "He admits it. Doctor Porthet, I implore you to do your duty!"

Porthet advanced hesitantly, waving an arm toward the sending-bowl of his apparatus. "Now, you get back in there," he warned.

THE Harry Preest thus addressed dodged behind one of the reintegrators which had so disastrously brought him into existence. He chuckled savagely. "Ha-ha! I can't get 'back' into the disintegrator because I was never in it in the first place—or was I? Anyway, Doctor Porthet and *Mister* Harry Preest," he added vindictively, "I tell you that you can't get rid of me by dissolving me into a bunch of vibrations! You can't, see? You can't, because it would be—murder!"

"Preest's smile froze on his lips, for Porthet, his eyes like huge black buttons in a white soup-plate, was not looking at him, but at something beyond. And that something beyond held terror for the rotund scientist. Preest faced puzzledly about, and nearly jumped backward through the laboratory wall in sheer amazement at what he saw."

"Me!" declared twin voices ungrammatically but promptly.

"You're a liar," said one shortly, and turned to the inventor. "You saw us materialize, doctor; which one is the extra Harry Preest?"

Two pairs of expectant eyes searched the scientist's face.

"My word," vociferated the plump one peevishly, "if you two men can't tell which is which, I assure you that I can not!"

"I *can* tell," grated one Preest then, pointing an accusing digit at his twin; "that man there is the extra Harry Preest —I swear it!"

"But——" spluttered Porthet uncomfortably.

"All right," snapped the second Preest, doubling his fists with great resolution, "suppose I *am* the Harry Preest who was reintegrated by mistake? You can't dematerialize me!"

"Murder?" This time it was Porthet who helped out the twin act in chorusing the word.

"Yes, murder!" repeated the defiant Preest loudly. "I am a living man with feelings just like anybody else, and you can't rub me out against my will because it's against the statutes of this state! So, what do you think of that?"

His counterpart was staggered into momentary silence, while Porthet seemed to be struggling with a violent fit of apoplexy. "He's right," the latter affirmed after a bit, "he's right—it would be murder to do away with him!"

The accused Harry Preest chortled triumphantly, in the true manner of villains since time immemorial. One of the hands

and noses of Harry Preest signaled arrogant victory to one of his two bodies.

"No, you're wrong!" blurted the baffled Preest after a few seconds of rapid thought. "It won't be murder to disintegrate this geezer, doc, because legally there can be only one Harry Preest—and that will be me!"

"Legal or not, here I am; and *my* name is Harry Preest as much as yours is, too. Even if one Harry Preest is still left alive, you can't get around the fact that one Harry Preest will be killed."

The plump little scientist fished wearily in a pocket, drew forth a tiny box, and prepared to down a couple of aspirins. "Gentlemen, gentlemen," he moaned for the tenth time, "we are not getting anywhere."

"Who wants to?" sneered the ostracized Preest sarcastically. "If you want to get anywhere, just step in your little sending-bowl and I'll ship you right off to infinity. How'd you like that?"

"Wup—my dear sir!" remonstrated Porthet hastily as he strangled over the masticated tablets. "I beg your pardon! Let us not forget for one instant just whom this paradoxical situation involves."

"I still say," spat a Preest acidly, his eyes glinting, "that it would be perfectly legal to erase that guy from this cartoon, and I——"

"No, no, my dear sirs." It was Porthet, the Great Mediator, at bat again. "Can you not see the light of truth? Suppose this other Harry Preest were to assume another name—then you must admit that it would be a grave criminal offense to destroy him, would it not? He is truly a distinct individual, you see; it is but a mere entanglement of names that is causing all this dreadful confusion. If——"

"There! That's it—I've got it!" exploded the accused Preest happily, vastly relieved at getting back out of dangerous territory. "Listen to me, both of you. The doc, here, is correct. This whole nasty stink is all over just the mere name of Harry Preest. Now, I've never particularly gone for that name—something more like Dixwood Carter Brent would suit me better. Anyway, here's the point. So far as I can make out, I seem to be a little bit more in the wrong than this other Harry Preest, even though I had nothing to do with it. But anyhow, I'll be the hero and make the sacrifice that has to be made. For that $1,000 over there on the table, and another stack of bills like it, I'll volunteer to change my name, buy a ticket to some other town, and never see either of you again. Is it a bargain?"

"But, my dear sir," protested the tight-trousered Porthet, at once, "it so happens that I have no extra thousand dollars to supply you with, although I would gladly do so were I able."

"Why, it's a cinch," interposed that one of the Preests whom the conversation did not immediately concern. "Look. Put the dough in the sending-bowl, pull the switch and *bloop!*, you'll have *two* reintegrated piles of money—two thousand dollars!"

"Sure," supplemented the other, readily. "Why not?"

"Gentlemen!" Porthet expostulated indignantly. "My *dear* Misters Preest! Now I ask you, does Emmett D. Porthet appear to you to be a low, caddish, sneaking *counterfeiter?*"

"What do you mean, counterfeiter?" asked Preest One.

"Those bills would be as real and as genuine as we are—exactly alike in all respects," confirmed Preest Two.

"Exactly." The dignified Porthet's words were clipped. "Exactly. Evidently you are not aware of the fact, my dear sirs, that the wonderfully efficient Gov-

ernment of this great nation keeps an accurate check on the serial numbers of all the bills it issues." He paused a moment before adding confidentially, "You see, gentlemen, I had thought of doing that some time ago, but realized the terrible mistake I should be making. The Government would certainly catch us at it."

"Well, it's two thousand berries, or I don't go," stated Preest One firmly. "You make the money and I'll take my chances at being caught with it."

Porthet wrinkled his brow confusedly.

"Come on, doc, it's the only way we'll get rid of this—this chiseler," urged Preest Two. "Besides, those bills will be so genuine nobody'll ever think of comparing the serial numbers."

The snugly-trousered cherub wavered, weakened and wilted. "Very well, gentlemen, very well. I am a clean-principled man, but in the face of such a dreadful state of affairs, I must unselfishly besmirch the heretofore stainless shield of the Porthet honor—not for myself, you understand, but for the sake of others." He stopped, and struck by a new thought, ventured, "But, my dear Mr. Preest, couldn't you let me keep just five hundred dollars of this extra money?"

"Two grand—or else," gritted a Preest haughtily, indicating by his supple use of the vernacular that he had witnessed more than one cinema epic of the underworld.

The fat doctor shrugged resignedly. "A princely ransom, my dear sir, but you shall have it. I must bend my will to yours. This way, please."

Porthet waddled off toward the stack of green currency, placidly braving the perils of the great wire jungle which all but engulfed him.

THE mercenary Preest was starting to do as the cherubic scientist bade him, but had not progressed far between the walls of wire before his counterpart tapped him hesitantly on the shoulder.

"Of course," said the latter, "you will adopt some sort of a disguise—shave off that mustache or let your beard grow, or something?"

"Well, as you know, we've grown our mustaches to cover a peculiar lip, but I'll consider it. I think my wife would object to a beard."

Preest One's heart did a hand-stand on his adam's apple. He stopped, paralyzed, in his tracks.

"What was that?" he asked in the ghost of a whisper, through inert lips.

"I said I'll have to shave off my mustache, because the little woman would probably object to——"

"D-di-did you mean to say that your *wife*——"

"Correct. I said that my wife would——"

Porthet turned on them impatiently, and motioned them forward.

Preest One waved him away. "Wait, doctor," he managed to gulp; then to his twin he choked, "Are you—*married?*"

"Sure," returned the other in surprize. "Aren't you?"

"Of course I'm married, but—is—I mean—are—who——"

A sudden gleam entered simultaneously into the slitted eyes of both Preests and the two pairs of Harry Preest's hands clenched themselves meaningly. Neither uttered a sound.

"Gentlemen!" murmured the aghast Porthet, shuddering with alarm. "My very dear sirs!"

Harry Preest ignored the gasps from the purpling cherub. Instead, he looked himself grimly in the eyes and grated, "*Whose* wife?"

"*My* wife!" he answered possessively to his own question.

"Listen, you," he grimaced next, ad-

vancing slowly upon himself, "there's been an extra one of us for just a little while too long, and I'm going to remedy that little difficulty right now!"

"You take one step closer," snarled Harry Preest to Harry Preest warningly, "and I'll knock you loose from a few of your front teeth. Get me?"

This was the first time in his life that Emmett D. Porthet had ever been faced with the problem of keeping a jealous man from fighting with himself over his own wife, but he rose to the occasion masterfully.

"My *dear* Misters Preest," he clamored in great fright. "Let us not lose our tempers. I can fix everything. If you will only just bring the charming Mrs. Preest here to my laboratory, I shall be only too glad to make one of her for each of you. There, won't that clear things up?"

"Nope. You don't——" started Preest One decidedly.

"——know my wife!" completed Preest Two with equal decision.

"But, my good friends—friend, I mean," implored the moon-faced scientist, "what, then, are we to do? One wife for two husbands? Tch, tch, tch, tch."

The unthinkable impasse was growing even more involved.

"Well, I know what I'm going to do," rasped Preest One; "I'm going to take my money and get my wife. Then we're both leaving this town tonight!" And he made a dive for the stack of bills.

"And I know what I'm going to do!" barked Preest Two, and made a similar dive at the fleeing figure of Preest Number One.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" howled the little man with the big stomach in a delirium of terror. "What's to become of all my beautiful apparatus?"

Preest Two showed his host what was to become of part of it, for after Preest One had clipped him with an exquisite right to the jaw, he deposited a goodly portion of a giant retort within the scalp of his attacking double. The next moment the screaming scientist was helplessly enmeshed in a net of wiring as lashing feet ripped loose half a dozen miles of intricate hook-ups. Together the pair of Preests tumbled in a writhing, primitive heap in the midst of the scientific maze, and hammering fists and flying oaths whistled through the scorched air.

It is an egregious and horrible sensation to be fighting oneself, a fact soon realized by Harry Preest both One and Two. After the first wild flurry and tilt, during which the two trusty right fists of Harry Preest scored heavily on both his rather protuberant noses, the duplicate antagonists lessened the energy of their onslaught considerably. The dual duel, if such it may be termed, settled down to the more strategic, if less spectacular, maneuvers of a thrust and parry form of warfare.

There would have been little or no object in continuing the conflict had not the absconding Preest been favored by the services of a *deus ex machina,* in the form of a raveling coil of rubber-coated wire. As the vengeful twain laughed at and pounded each other like a man shadow-boxing with his reflection in the mirror, neither could gain any advantage over the other, for the two Preests were exactly equal in thought and action. Being literally the same man, each could foretell just what the other would attempt next and so could launch a ferocious counter-attack against all broadsides. Also their common speed, craftiness and strength were contributing factors which rendered the struggle even, to a mathematical preciseness.

But Fate, as ever was her wont, intervened, and the Preest who was not only

battling for his wife but also for a thousand good United States dollars, found himself in a ticklish predicament as, in endeavoring to haul up a terrific roundhouse right, he suddenly discovered that it was suspended in midair by a spiral of heavy wire which had snared him as neatly as though his adversary had deliberately set the trap.

OF COURSE the absconding Preest had not intentionally lassoed his opponent with the noose of wire, but he made full use of the situation. Wiping the crimson stains of siege from his battered nose with one hand, he simultaneously loosed a snarl of victory and a fistic thunderbolt, rendering his entangled twin temporarily *hors de combat.* The triumphant warrior staggered to his feet with difficulty and turned to resume his rudely terminated flight to love and riches.

Meanwhile, the plump cherub in the laboratory apron had replaced his dangling spectacles upon the bony ridge from which they had been knocked, and struggled valiantly from his own enshrouding web of wires. As the incredible duel raged to its disappointing conclusion, the portly pillar of science had warily neared the scene of carnage with a heavy lamp-stand in one upraised hand, ready to aid his fallen comrade should the wrong Mr. Preest emerge triumphant.

So it was, when an enraged and somewhat tattered Preest did arise from the shambles on the floor, the cautious inventor greeted him ominously with, "See here, my dear sir, exactly which Mr. Preest do you happen to be?"

"How should I know?" snorted the conqueror shortly, and with a superbly placed thump of his fist in the very midst of Porthet's capacious paunch, reduced that menacing gentleman to a state of complete speechlessness, breathlessness, and helplessness. The stricken scientist doubled up like a folding jack-knife, spun sideways and crashed headlong into the delicate mechanism of his precious dematerializer.

With the jangle of splintering tubes and the crash of crumbling apparatus sounding a discordant pæan of complete victory in his ears, the sole Harry Preest who was upright in posture if not in principles, glared once about the chaos he had created, then wheeled and fled into the night. The villain—the superfluous man—was at large!

The defeated Harry Preest crawled dazedly to his feet as the front door slammed mightily behind the back of his counterpart, and began wrenching at the constricting bands of wire which held him prisoner. Out of the corner of his eye as he did so, he spied a plump but disheveled little pink-faced man seated in a ruin of shattered instruments, weeping dolorously.

"My invention," he wailed as he in turn glimpsed the other through his copious tears. "My invention—you smashed it completely. Oh, I hate you, Harry Preest, I hate you both—indiscriminately!"

"Never mind that now," ordered Preest breathlessly. "Where'd he go? That other Preest is loose. We've *got* to catch him! Snap out of it, doc—he's gone!"

The scientist was jerked to his feet by the scruff of his ample neck and dragged in frenzied pursuit behind the avenging Harry Preest.

"We'll tear out the back way and head him off," Preest grunted as he ran; "he'd have to go by that way to get to my house. Step on it, will you?"

Out the back way and down a dark and narrow alley the pair raced, Porthet's gasping breaths inhaled in noisy sobs.

The night was very dark; consequently the dim rectangle of the alley-mouth was difficult to observe with any degree of clarity, but just before they reached it the flying figure of a man whizzed past. The pursuers leapt out into the thoroughfare and saw the galloping form of Harry Preest just ahead of them.

"Hey, you! Stop!" bawled the other Preest at the top of his lungs.

"Try and catch me!" bellowed the first Preest, snatching a hurried glance backward as he dashed off the curb into the street. "I can run as fast as you can!"

"Look out!" shrieked Preest Two frantically to his racing twin. For the white beams of a hurtling automobile abruptly drilled the darkness as it sped recklessly across the intersection.

Preest Two's warning came too late. Preest One flung out his arms madly in a vain attempt to ward off the monster on wheels as it bore swiftly down on him, and the next second it was all over. There came a horrible screeching and skidding and the roaring automobile spun about in a complete circle, jumped the curb, missed a telephone pole by inches, then careened off down the street in the direction whence it had appeared.

"Hit and run!" the pursuing Preest flung over his shoulder at the paralyzed and quavering Porthet, then raced toward the crumpled body in the street.

"Is—is he dead?" queried the plump doctor tremulously as one Preest swung the other to his shoulders and staggered to the sidewalk.

"No. He's unconscious but breathing," said the rescuer, puffing from his exertions. "Well, we got him. But now what on earth shall we do with him? Where can we take him?"

"My place, my place," chattered Porthet, trotting off. "I'm a very excellent doctor, you know. I'll take care of him and nobody will ever be the wiser. A hospital would mean endless complications, you see, my dear fellow. This way, this way, sir."

DOCTOR PORTHET looked up with a sigh from the man he had just examined for injuries. "The fellow has a nasty knock on the head, a broken right arm, and a few minor cuts and bruises."

"Nothing more serious?" demanded his listener. "I thought he was a goner. Machine must have just clipped him as it swung by, I guess."

"Exactly," responded the smaller man. "He'll be up and about in two or three days, I should venture. Let's get him to bed here; then perhaps you had better go home to your wife till tomorrow. I shall be able to manage him alone without difficulty."

"O. K., doc." Harry Preest, unhurt, did not know exactly whether to feel happy, sad or sorry at the way affairs had turned out. But no matter what, the whole infernal business was far from being settled—of that he was certain.

As Harry Preest, unharmed, walked slowly homeward that night, his brain feebly grappled with the amazing dilemma in which he found himself. Harry Preest—two men! A pair of Harry Preests, precisely alike in all respects and each reluctant to give place to the other. Twin Harry Preests with a common home, a common wife, a common temper. An incredible twain of individuals, one of which must vanish somehow, in some way, soon; but neither of whom would ever be willing to take the dooming step. What was the answer to this paradox of paradoxes . . . or was there any answer?

When Harry Preest stepped into the bedroom of his darkened apartment, his wife was gone and on his pillow there

was pinned a note. It read: "Gone to Aunt Christobel's—rheumatism again—will be home in the usual three days—Daphne."

The man who was two men thankfully hurried back to Porthet's laboratory to spend the night where he could keep close watch on his double.

That night, a day, and another night passed, during which the figure on the bed rolled and groaned uneasily, but did not awaken; and during which two very perplexed men discussed endlessly and unsatisfactorily the baffling problem with which they were confronted. A man who was two men—ghastly paradox!

Then, at last, on the morning of the second day, the man in bed unexpectedly groaned loudly, pulled himself to a sitting position, and demanded huskily, "What happened?"

His two nurses were at his side in an instant. The doctor felt his pulse. The other man just stood and stared in dreadful expectancy. The whole mad mess was about to resume its nightmare complications once again, he thought, and braced himself for the ordeal.

"What happened?" the sick man dully shifted his gaze from one man to another. "Where am I? Who are you two men? Who am *I?*"

Stunned silence.

A pinwheel of words was spinning in the brains of two of that grotesque trio. The meaning of the whispered sentences simultaneously struck home in the minds of the neatly groomed doctor and his lanky assistant with the force of a bursting bomb.

"What did you say?" gasped Porthet unbelievingly.

"Who *are* you?" echoed that incredulous Preest who stood by the bed.

"Yes," husked the bandaged man softly. "My mind seems all a blank. Who am I? Don't you know?"

Again a brief interval of appalled silence; then the whirling brain of the Preest who was standing steadied itself and came to his rescue. Words rushed from his mouth in a torrent.

"Do we know who you are?" he yelped joyously to the man in bed. "I'll say we do. Listen! You're a friend of mine — named Dixwood Carter Brent. You live in—in the East—in, uh, Vermont. You, ah, came here on business—and made a thousand dollars. You got hit by a speeding auto, you've been asleep for a week, and you should have been home days ago. And you've got to leave for Vermont on the first train you can—or—or—or you'll lose your job. See?"

"Exactly, my dear sir," an amazed Porthet acquiesced rapidly; "ah, er, uh—exactly!"

The man in bed creased his brow in a frown of complete bewilderment. He blinked dubiously at each of the two excited men who hovered about him.

"Oh. Oh, yes . . . I see," he muttered slowly at last. "Thank you very much!"

* * * * *

I glanced at the pale-faced, nervous man who had stopped his restless pacing, and now stood staring at me expectantly. He was watching me with odd earnestness, licking dry lips, pulling at a button on his coat.

"Quite a mix-up, wasn't it?" I smiled, for lack of anything else to say. He nodded a jerky affirmative. "But—uh, this other man? What about the similarity—the mustache and all? And didn't he find out you were lying to him? How about——"

"No, he never suspected a thing. His right arm was battered up; so he asked me if I would shave him—said he felt well enough to make the trip to Vermont at once. Well, when I shaved him I did a good job—took off mustache and all.

I have a peculiar upper lip, and without a mustache to hide it, it alters the whole cast of my face. He never even dreamed that we two were the same man.

"As to the story I had told him, Porthet didn't dare do anything but back me up; and after all, that thousand dollars cold cash that I sacrificed *was* strongly convincing, you must admit. He was a little reluctant to leave at first, though, since he couldn't get any details about where he was going. But Porthet fixed that by saying that if the jolting of the train didn't bring everything back to him, he should go see the authorities in the town of Vermont where we sent him. Said that they'd help him get rid of his amnesia.

"Of course, as you know, when he went to the authorities they would simply hold him for a day or so, while they tried to identify him, and after a while he would be released, since he was perfectly all right otherwise. He's safe somewhere now, and perfectly happy with that thousand, I'll bet. Anything else?"

"Never heard from him, I suppose?"

"No. I wanted to keep an eye on him, but I knew it wouldn't do to have letters coming to my house addressed to me in my own handwriting. Anyway, it was safer not to give him any clue so that he might get hold of me again—if anything should ever happen to bring back *my* memory to *him*, I mean."

"Hm-m, very interesting," I said. "And is that all?"

"No, that isn't all!" the man called Harry Preest almost shouted, stabbing me in the chest with a lanky forefinger. "That's nothing! Listen! Day and night, night and day, awake or dreaming, I am tormented with the one thought: who am I? Am I really Harry Preest or am I really that other self, Dixwood Carter Brent? Is this *me* here talking to you, or am I away off in Vermont somewhere under an assumed name, not knowing my true identity? If I really am Harry Preest—then who is that other man? And if he's really Harry Preest—then who am I?"

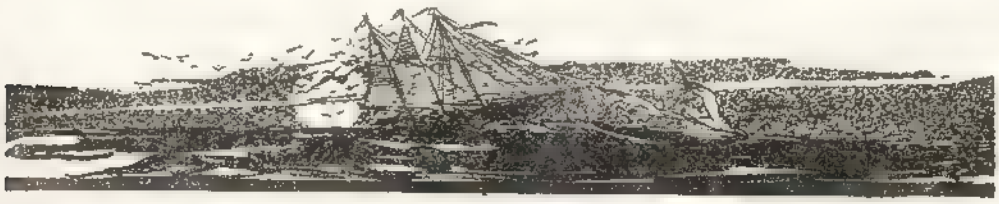
Long fingers crumpled my lapels in a hard grip. Gleaming eyes stared into mine. "Answer me!" he commanded, raising his voice to a shriek. "Answer me! *Who am I?* Who is *he?*—WHO ARE YOU?"

Speechless, I gasped in unmitigated horror, and jerked myself free. I looked askance at the man called Harry Preest. Was the fellow a madman? The light in his eyes was that of fanaticism, all right.

I backed slowly away and clenched my fists, fully prepared to sell my life dearly. But just at that moment a familiar voice broke in on us, and we both glanced up. A man in a white uniform was opening the door behind me, jerking his head in my direction cheerily.

"O. K. there, Napoleon," he said to me quietly, in friendly fashion. "You've been playing at Waterloo long enough and Josephine is worried about you. Come on, Your Highness."

For a moment I looked at the other occupant of the cell in considerable embarrassment, then rose and left hurriedly. The Empress gets very impatient with me if I keep her waiting.



"Elof! Elof! Oh, Elof!" it whispered.

The Hand of the O'Mecca

By HOWARD WANDREI

A strange, uncanny story about the weird figures that beset Elof Bocak one night in the fog, and the courting of a witch-woman

IT WAS Elof Bocak, large and unmistakable. Like the two figures that waited for him in the lane, he most nearly resembled an erect shadow. His formidable stature alone identified him. Unlike those two shadow-fig-

ures, which were still, his body gyrated remarkably above his feet. Elof had that in him tonight which was stronger than himself. In John Colander's kitchen behind him the whisky ran. They had filled him with drink tonight, for was he not questing after the hand of Kate O'Mecca? A hazardous quest, perhaps, on this night. Fog trapped the land; the murky skeins of it crept stealthily southwest over the Colander farm, over the rolling Minnesota hills as though they needed to be concealed.

While Elof profoundly calculated through which of the thirty-two points of the compass lay the O'Mecca farm, he plucked a quip of felt from his head as one would skin a grape and wrung the whisky out of it. And a brace of still phantoms awaited the mighty, befuddled Bocak in the lane. Naïve Elof!—there were more shadows in his head tonight than walked abroad. In back of him the drinking Finns made the Colander kitchen echo and re-echo like a giant's hall.

"On the head of himself!" the Colander had roared, upon which six farmers had lifted their brimming tumblers to the O'Mecca. The seventh, who was John Colander himself, crowned Elof's pate with a full glass. This, the farmers agreed, was an efficacious, Finnic means of expediting Kate and Elof's troth.

White, inland fog brimmed the hollows with ghostly pools and phantom lakes as Elof reeled across Colander's acres. The spirit of the corn hummed in his veins; there seemed to be a bumblebee locked in his skull, a bee that droned and strove to escape as he mounted the lane through the east hill pasture, singing. Elof had a short throat, but he could send up the staggering notes of his love song high enough with it. It was a fool's defiance, and a fool's lusty passion. Diminutive owls hooted at him and fled back through the woods. When Elof sang the night was only big enough for himself.

On the far side of the hill a long slough sprawled in ambush, drowned in a lake of fog and darkness. The fog was too heavy to breathe. It was the thickest fog that any man had ever seen, but it would take more than a slough to mire the feet of him. His headlong gait steered him down into the slough, and then the two figures that had been standing and waiting for him disengaged themselves from the fog. They joined him so that they were three abreast, with Elof between. The hill rose behind them and blinked out the rollicking lights of John Colander's kitchen. Hereupon Elof halted, puzzled. He thought he had heard someone chuckling in the fog. Either that, or the fog itself had taken a voice. Summer insects clicked and chattered in the wet grass; the silences were flooded with strange low sobbings and stilly whispers. Elof moved on warily. Suddenly he found himself set upon.

Sometimes, belike when you have the cosmic night and the foggy silences to yourself, it becomes fatal to advertise. Highwaymen amongst the Minnesota hills are few, to be sure, but down that dingle lurks the hobo and his kind, and other creatures not so easy to lay your hands on.

The two strangers had a damned familiar way about themselves. When Elof realized that these shapes were solid and not figments of fog, he stopped short with his legs astraddle. He looked first at one and then at the other; he hunched his shoulders ominously; then he raised his hands and turned his hat completely around once. The two shapes took hold of his arms at the biceps. Thereupon Elof growled, as beast speaks unto beast; for the scruff bristles at the tail of the scalp

when things accost one in the dark with their own silence.

The grips on his arms strengthened. Bocak answered by spreading his hands. He spread them flat with his thumb ends resting lightly on his thighs. While he peered into the eyes of these alien shapes, thunderstruck, his churning wits plunged back into the murky lore of his people.

Werewolves loped over Kalevala's moors, indeed, in Finland. His own grandfather, with a long and lucky shot, had brought down a thing in the vale of Woinemoinen. The thing his grandfather slew left black blood and drowned itself in running water before it could be captured. In the morning they dragged the naked body of a handsome farm girl from the stream, a human being with a bullet through her breast. No one doubted that this girl was a werewolf. Elof's grandfather swore that he had shot a hairy thing running on all fours.

But the shadows which had taken the Bocak prisoner were standing erect. It was difficult to see one's own feet in this fog; nevertheless Elof perceived the things were not wolves. True, they might be vested in a hide of short black hair, and he could truly see the gleam of a pointed tooth, but they were never wolves. Then he saw, indeed, that each freaked a short, broad tail like that of the fallow deer, but shorter. The things had tails that flicked and frolicked in the fog in a rhythmic dance of their own. When Elof saw the tails frisking he howled like a wild dog that has newly discovered the moon.

They heard him howl down there in Colander's ribald kitchen. They laughed with rural gusto and they drank high, tumbling, flat-footed jokes across the Colander board. "Ha!" said John Colander. "Himself has run into himself in the fog!"

A BRIEF, terrible conflict began at the edge of the slough, a savage conflict in spite of the fact that it was one-sided from the first. Confronted with sinews which he thought must be like his own, Elof turned berserk. He methodically set about tearing the fog to shreds. A suddenly born army of shapes in the fog nibbled mischievously at his flanks. He lifted a young poplar out of the ground and whirled with it, snapping the tree short to wield it like a club. The ball of earth at its roots described a meteoric arc over his head, showered sand on the streaming grass. It thumped on something with the sound a football makes when it hits one's stomach. Armor might have cracked under that mace.

Elof's legs became entangled in solid shadow, which he seized forthwith. This mass he lifted on high; he sent it rioting round and round his head in endless, giddy revolutions while he twisted off a troublesome skein of fog that had clutched his windpipe.

"Elof! Elof!" The thing barked softly at him with a sound like palms clapping. "Elof! Elof! Oh, Elof!" it whimpered.

Elof didn't hear it. He brought the soaring, twisting shape to earth with a crash of finality. He planned to dispatch the first shape in like manner, but when he searched for it on the ground on hands and knees it had vanished.

Continuing his search, at the same time getting earth stains on his fresh trousers, he came to the conclusion that the shape he had just felled had managed to absent itself from his ken also. Whereupon he assumed his feet, marvelously unsteady. With the easy transit of intoxication from one mood to another, once more he conjured up thoughts of the O'Mecca and this night's mission. As victor, he could not determine just whom he had beaten.

He saw mocking lights in the distance and stumbled through the slough toward the O'Mecca farm.

THE history of events leading up to those of this foggy night was of a singular order. Three farms, the Bocak's, the Colander's, and the O'Mecca's, lay in a direct line southwest of Mankato in the Minnesota hills. Two Fridays preceding this, Elof had rested on his plow at dusk. He narrowly considered the fact that he lacked a wife. The old fogies having gone their way, he had a rich farm of his own with a red, hip-roofed barn filled with cattle. Elof's brother Frankel, in reality the elder son, had forfeited his birthright two years past. This deed Frankel executed easily by capping a wheat-stack, tobogganing down its golden side and spitting himself on seventeen inches of pitchfork. Two years Elof and his sister Edna had turned the earth, sowed and harvested alone; intolerably alone with Edna, for that valkyrie of a woman was dumb. The Bocak house was silent.

Elof had abandoned the plow, tossing the reins to Edna, and stamped across the furrows to the kitchen of John Colander. Was not that the shortest way to the O'Mecca?

"Ho, John, I am in need of a wife," said Elof.

"Then sit you down and eat," said John, his mouth crammed with bread and potatoes. "A woman can always wait until afterward."

The Colanders were pillaging their evening board—John himself, his slaved rag of a wife that he was plowing into the ground to join the first one, and his two stalwart sons. Elof set to with no delay. He sacked his frame tight with fried potatoes drowned in sorghum, three tender chops from the carcass of a freshly slaughtered pig, and fat pie made from the pregnant purple berry that grows on the hillsides.

Colander tossed his knife and fork into his plate.

"Kate O'Mecca has no kin but her old mother," said John, "and this year she plows but one field. Her cattle are dry, her land chokes with weeds. The O'Mecca man is dead."

Elof nodded. It was Severin O'Mecca whom John spoke of: Kate's brother. Elof had known him well, had matched speed and strength with him hoeing down the long rows of young corn. It had happened in the spring. The O'Mecca windmill was old, and Severin had set about repairing it. He had climbed the tower, disconnected the pump shaft below the windmill in order to repair the vanes. From that height he had fallen; the metal shaft pierced his stomach, skewered him down to the lock nut on the pump before he could stop himself. Kate and her husk of a mother could never hope to till the broad O'Mecca acres alone.

"We are ripe for each other," said Elof, tremendously pleased within himself. It was the wife he wanted. The Colander had named the one who walked in the distance like thistledown, with her fleet grace and yellow hair. Elof cultivated a hill that rose against Colander's northwest acreage. Twice it had been seeded in clover, and not long since he had plowed the field in for wheat. Elof never grudged the time required to plow-in that stony hill, for it had a far view of the O'Mecca farm and the road she used. It had a nearer view of the brook that fed the slough, where Kate bathed like a blond angel in the sight of God. Elof wondered what the dark stains were which she washed from her naked body on the stroke of dawn. "When I am an old fogy," said Elof to the Colander, "I must have sons like yours after the plow."

"She will never refuse you," said the Colander, eyeing his neighbor up and down with a show of envy. "You will sell me some of your land . . . and I will let some of mine so that all your fields, yours and Kate's, will lie together."

They clapped each other on the back, as though by the turn of a phrase the marriage had been consummated. They drank clear corn liquor that was three summers old. When Elof traversed the O'Mecca farmyard an hour later he found it difficult not to trample on the flight of bats that skirmished next to the ground around the weather-torn farmhouse—leather shadows flirting next to the ground, a phenomenon to consider well, whether one is drunk or sober.

KATE and her mother, a hawk-eyed wisp who reminded one of a cornstalk with her twist of scant dry hair, received him with considerable but guarded interest.

"The bats are aground tonight," Elof grinned. "In Finland, then, the werewolves are running. It is the sign."

Kate and her mother nodded. They looked at each other, making some knowing sign with their eyes. But they beckoned Elof in, withal, not choosing to turn a suitor away because the Colander kitchen lay between the two farms. Having gained entrance, then, and been set among a pile of fine cushions in the parlor, Elof bent himself to the close task of talking easily of earth and cattle.

For forty minutes Elof spoke confidently and with that specious eloquence furnished by corn. There is a rural method of making a point sidewise. By treading on its skirts, by firing a word or two nigh it but not at it, by speaking of himself in terms of someone else, Elof gave the mummied ancient and the corn-maiden to understand precisely what he wanted. It was the courtship oblique. He departed with his proposal unspoken, yet stated in classic restraint with unmistakable clarity.

Outside the rotting farmhouse the eccentric shadows still moved in darts and flurries over the ground. The sidelong statement of his argument for Kate's hand had gone far toward untangling his wits. A cool hand played across his shoulders. His skin roughened. Untilled, the O'Mecca farm was yielding a fine harvest of burdock and rank grass which had become speedily populated with mice. There was a kind of squeaking, quasi-cannibalism going on here. The bats flew next to the ground at their nocturnal feasting. It was time indeed that the sinews of the Bocak furrowed this wretched crop into the ground. So he delivered a lordly, proprietary kick at the leather wings that frisked in the moonlight. Very likely he sundered a shadow or two.

Next Friday Elof had perched on the high stone steps of his woodshed and fretted with impatience. The engine he balanced on one extended forefinger was the rifle he had been shooting rats with. It was a heavy repeating weapon which he wielded with terrible efficiency. The last clean shot, indeed, had not only parted the rat's vital thread, it had ricocheted off the boulder supporting the corn crib and, save for a negligible string of feathered hide, decapitated a prize black Minorca. The cock still sprang into the air in its bewildered, mortal dance; Elof continued to sit on the stoop of the woodshed, bent on solving the casuistries of courtship. His elbows rested on a blurred crease in his trouser legs. A crease, nevertheless. He was freshened for the chase, against his will. Clean trousers—the distant smell of raw gasoline was still among them. A black cloud of hair on his bared forearms—the reward of wonderful toil with boiled yellow soap. Edna looked up at him regularly from

the doorway of the summer-house as she whisked the handle of the separator. She was a kind of female clockwork. She knew well enough what ailed him. She was a woman.

Through the woods beyond Bocak's stock yard came sounds from the busy kitchen of the Colander. The two houses were only the long cast of a stone separated. The voices of field men who had toiled and were now in their cups—the sounds stormed Bocak's simple imagination with illimitable promise. He thought of his neat, clean, cold bed of down, cursed once in Finnish. The rhythmically rising and falling whine of the separator was intolerable. He stood the gun in a corner. He made off for the Colander kitchen with Edna, the dumb one, standing in the doorway looking after him. She would stand there with her eyes on nothing for a time. Edna dreamed. Edna, having no tongue, held converse with nature alone. By one of those common caprices of providence, she knew hidden things. She knew, for example, that Kate O'Mecca would never sleep in her brother's bed. She herself could not say how she knew this. Presently she would make a slow shrug, lug the can of cream into the cool depths of the root cellar. It was uncommonly heavy cream this year, rich in fat.

COLANDER and his men welcomed Elof with a tumbler brimming with the clear fire of the corn. Afterward, when the Bocak mounted the lane that lifted over the east hill pasture, he was well fortified against the hell's-play of low-flying bats that came half-way down to meet him. Bats earthbound, perilous to walk among.

It had been his sober intention to give the O'Mecca two full weeks of grace. If this was haste, the guilt would lie with John Colander and his corn whisky in the morning. They had made him drunk. Well, one week was sufficient. Now that his wits had been given a stiff prodding, he knew that he would have hung fire only one week anyhow. Was he not his father's son, and was he not master of his father's acres? Having addressed himself at length and aloud, Elof swore that he was. He swooped low with a hand outspread like a flail and whooped as he sent the bat-like shadows tumbling. Bats. He thought again of the werewolves of Finland, whose appearance must be announced by these grounded bats. Werewolves and vampire-wolves. Some time ago a young man was buried in a near-by town, a handsome boy who had his throat torn open one night by a wild dog. It was an odd thing that no blood was found on the ground. The dog must have been a ranger, since all known dogs in the community were chained at night.

The bats flicked somberly among Elof's feet like Satan's own hellish skirts as he traversed the O'Mecca farmyard and clubbed his knuckles on the door. It was a moderate sound, comparatively. There was a certain elephantine elegance in his love.

If Kate and her mother had received him with guarded interest on one occasion, on this it was a covert eagerness before which he stood abashed, even with his head spinning at this pace. Elof set his frame amongst Kate's fine cushions with immense precision; the two women rested delicately before him on straight walnut chairs, their heads cocked at precisely the same angle. There was something gracefully wing-like in their white hands as they folded them in their laps. These were no ordinary farm women. They did not look as though they toiled. On this second visit Elof dared to look upon his woman directly. It was a thirsty appraisal, as though he would take her down at one draft. You scarcely knew

whether you were safe to have her within reach of your hands. Elof could stand his team on the hill and covet her puff of yellow hair at a distance of a hundred rods with no immediate consequences.

Kate was a smooth white filly with narrow hips like a panther, like a woman who had never labored and never would. Elof frowned somewhat at that. She was as slender as a city woman. But he remembered that his own mother had such hips. Her three children had come easily and unharmed save for Edna, whose voice, when it sounded at all, had a unique kinship with the owl's. The tiny nipples of Kate's breasts stood up through the fine woolen cloth of her dress. That was a good sign. The O'Mecca had sidelong, subtle gray eyes that forced one into speech.

"John Colander," said Elof, "has land against mine which he will bargain for with me."

The O'Mecca smiled, whether with amusement or agreement he could not determine. But it was a neat, correct speech, compact and well phrased. When you considered it, you knew there was a plan afoot to stagger the acres of the three farms. This plan could be realized best by marriage. You knew that John Colander was going to slip to the southwest and get somewhat the better of the bargain in the end. You knew that Kate O'Mecca was going to sidle back around him so that her land would meet that of the Bocak's.

The third Friday came with the fog. It was presupposed by those testing the wind that it was to be a courtship in three tries. On the third Friday Edna trimmed Elof's duster of black hair with the long, sharp shears in her sewing-kit. Edna wanted to say to Elof, "You want Kate O'Mecca's long white body in your bed. Much good may it do you." She wanted to say, "Where is Kate tonight? Where will she be? Do you think a woman like that rests in her own parlor after nightfall? Have you never looked into those slant gray eyes of hers?" She wanted to tell Elof that marrying Kate was fatal, that Kate O'Mecca had pointed teeth and a scarlet tongue; but Edna was dumb.

The fertile black soil of the fields that had stained Elof's nails a full summer disappeared under the carving-knife, after prodigious scraping. Edna watched the futile toil with a curious smile on her mouth. When the door closed after Elof, Edna made her singular slow shrug again, but her face was uneasy.

When Elof announced to the assembly of farmers in John Colander's kitchen that he was inquiring after the O'Mecca's hand tonight, his ears rattled and his back stung with their approval. In two weeks' time! They had to drink to this Finn who could not contain himself. They had to drink to his lucky woman, too. And they drank again. They envied him in the only way they knew. By saturating him with liquor, and themselves with him, they conferred their own kind of regard on him. Corn whisky flowed like a treacherous brook. They poured it into Elof's gullet up to his throat level.

Elof sat in their midst with the thick glaze stealing into his eyes. He was not joking this night, nor smiling at the jokes of others. Nor would he ever do so afterward. He was thinking of Kate's straight, pale yellow hair that rested in a knot on her shoulder. It was the hair that should flood across his pillow at night like sunlight. He thought of her high breasts and the sound color in her cheeks, her scarlet mouth. She looked strong. Their children would be the sturdiest that ever sat on a peg stool to take a lesson in milking. He would show them how to knuckle the udder, the knack that shot

milk into the pail so that it filled with foam. Yet neither of the O'Mecca women had ever spoken a word to him. Like the dumb Edna. Elof thought of that, but never thought it was singular. Well, then, he had never asked a question that needed to be answered. Tonight was the third Friday and the night of troth. He would ask his question and take his answer at last. Yet here he stalled in the Colander kitchen while the corn went round in uproarious drafts. A stronger thirst brought him to his feet. Elof used a particular Finnish curse and shouldered his way through the door into the creeping festoons of fog. Two shapes on the hill looked down at him, and then looked at each other.

The most tremendous fog within memory was on him, the thickest that had ever moved over the land. He mopped his narrow forehead with a yard of red kerchief when he reached the hill's base. They had saluted his queer hat with a full glass of whisky back there. It stank. He took the round, sopping skim of felt from his head and crushed it in one hand. The night was against him. All the way up the lane he quarreled with his feet. Farther on, shadows set upon him, and though Colander's whisky had nearly mastered him he defeated those scavenging shadows with certainty and dispatch. In his drunkenness the Minnesota hills and the Finnish moors were one. He thought the bats had grounded and the wolves were abroad. He thought they had tried to take advantage of him, and that he, in the full lustihead of his prowess, had torn a forepaw from one of them.

His visions were alternately clear and chaotic, like those of dreams. The fog was magically embodying itself. When he tripped in it he purposefully dismembered it as though he were matched against human antagonists. It became impossible for him to distinguish between the true and the false. His wits felt heavy as a grindstone, a stone that shot off sparks in all directions as he bore down heavily on it—bore down on it with *something*. What was it? He shook his head. He had done something important on the hill, something to tell Kate about. Someone on the hill had called him by name. He could hear the thin echoes mocking him. Elof! Elof!

He thrashed through the slough with a million muck-demons sucking and snapping after his heels, and raised the O'Mecca farmhouse, vaguely and gingerly patting himself as though he had been beaten on the way or had forgotten something. It was probably the thing he was bringing to bear against the metaphorical grindstone. There was a thing in his pocket. The lights in the O'Mecca parlor still welcomed him dimly in the fog, though it was past twelve, just past twelve by the clock. Love waits on time when it goes spinning in drink.

It was that *thing* he had picked up on the way, the trophy that would prove his prowess and his fearlessness to Kate O'Mecca. Had not two werewolves leaped on him and been defeated? That was it. For he was not in the least damaged by his encounter at the edge of the slough. He had neither scratch nor bruise, nothing but the fresh earth stains on his knees, a spattering of muck from the slough. Something pressed against his thigh in the pocket that confined his handkerchief. When he brought his knuckles down on the door he was remembering what it was. He had fought with a pair of werewolves across the slough. That was it.

KATE was looking down at him long before he knew she was there. Drunken and bewildered, the Bocak had taken a terrible object from his pocket

and was glaring at it. It was the bloody paw of the werewolf. When the fog in the slough turned solid, an erect beast with a frisking tail had tried to throttle him. He had twisted off its offending claw as he would behead a chicken—by whipping its wild body around his head like a limp club. The werewolf's bloody claw, indeed! Without giving it much thought, as is the way with mighty men, he had deposited the claw in his pocket for safe-keeping along with his kerchief. At the time, he had been vaguely aware that it was a fairly large claw, one with a stiff scrub of black hair and short toes mounted with panther-like nails. He remembered that the claw was singularly naked between the toes. But now, as he stupidly regarded it with supreme and swiftly mounting horror, he saw that it was a claw no longer. It was smooth and slim and white, a human hand. It was, in fact, Kate O'Mecca's hand; of that he could not be mistaken. He had plucked the O'Mecca's hand out of the fog.

Kate stood in the doorway, and to her Elof raised his eyes fearfully. Her arm was outstretched toward the terrifying object Elof still held. Her arm was graceful and perfect, the flesh smooth and creamy, but it ended at the wrist. Kate's scarlet mouth was fixed in a smile. Elof knew now why neither Kate nor her mother had ever spoken to him. It was because they were afraid of showing their teeth. Kate's teeth were pointed like slim ivory needles. Only the two dainty front incisors met squarely. The gums were not the moist pink color of a human being's. They were scarlet, the glistening, jeweled red of the wolf's. And though he could not see it, he knew that she had a long, slim, red tongue like a ribbon. He knew it now. Kate O'Mecca was a werewolf. He knew that he had killed her mother, crushed her skull back in the slough, and that Kate must have drowned the skinny carcass when she fled.

Elof stepped back; the werewolf's hand slipped from his clasp and bounced down the wooden steps in front of the door.

Kate's long, sleepy eyes slanted into Elof's with an expression of profound scorn, pity, and hatred, as though she were imparting secret knowledge. He was hearing her cool, husky voice for the first time, and there was mockery in it:

"Then you have asked——" she began.

It was a lie. The night, the fog and the corn whisky had played a ghoulish prank on him. It never happened. Yet Kate O'Mecca once had two hands like anyone else, for he had seen them when he courted her the last two Fridays. And now her right hand was lying on the ground at his feet. She was a werewolf, as he had proved by twisting off her hand across the slough. She had called to him then. Her voice now was the same that had wept "Elof! Elof!" at the edge of the slough, wept when he had hurt her so.

He took yet another step back. And he turned and fled with the cool, inexorable voice pursuing him, haunting him for ever. "Then you have asked for my hand, Elof!" said Kate. . . .

"It slithered toward him."

Shadows of Blood

By EANDO BINDER

A grim story of torture in the cruel days of the Roman Emperor Caligula

IT WAS late in the fall. Over the shadow-engulfed waters of the Tiber a raw wind blew down from the north. A cold white moon swung over the Seven Hills, riding half submerged through a bank of heavy black clouds. The night was eery, made for evil things.

A guard, standing before the portals of a secluded villa, drew his long cloak more tightly about him. Sullenly, he cursed his metallic accouterments that seemed to absorb thricefold the chill of the night. Crouching closer into the small cubicle hewn into the marble of the wall beside the entrance, teeth chattering, he wondered if it were not better to be up north fighting the barbarians. True, there the cold was yet more intense, but one could warm his blood in the heat of battle, and not stand like this, silently, like an evil spirit of the night, freezing and shivering.

As he stood there holding his great spear in cloak-muffled hands, the moon broke for a short spell through the dense clouds and momentarily illuminated the park-like expanse before him. Suddenly a shadow detached itself from a blotch of blackness cast by a group of poplars, and slithered toward him. Tago Titus flung aside his cloak and took firmer grip of the spear. His Emperor, Caligula Cæsar, was within, and it was his duty to see that no enemy, or evil thing of the night, should pass beyond the entrance.

Closer and closer came the moving shadow. The fitful light of the moon made it appear as if an ugly portion of the black wraith above had been cast to earth. With appendages like beating wings, it seemed not human as it floated toward him over the shadowy lawn. Brave Titus of the Roman legions fought off a momentary awesome fear, and, forgetting the cold, stepped forth to battle this gruesome, unearthly thing. It was nearly upon him as he leveled his great spear.

"Who goes there?" he challenged with a throaty rasp.

The shadow stopped as if surprized to find opposition to its approach. The guard heaved a sigh of relief, for now he saw it was human after all. Anything earthly a Legionary could fight. He called his challenge again, this time with a more confident ring in his voice.

"It is I, Junga of the Huns," came a hoarse voice from the head-folds of the cloak worn by the newcomer. At the same time the concealing cloth was withdrawn somewhat to reveal a visage of extreme ugliness. The swarthy, parched skin was drawn tightly over the bones. It was like the face of a mummified corpse.

"Bah—a barbarian!" rumbled the guard, angered because of his own superstitious fears. "Away with you, Hun! You have no business here."

"But I seek audience with the Emperor!" the trespasser remonstrated, not retreating a step.

Titus' lips curled scornfully. "Caligula Cæsar does not give audience to every heathen from the north. Have you some

talisman, some mark or sign of the Cæsar's favor?"

"Nay, that I have not."

"Then you can not enter these portals!"

"But I say that Cæsar——"

The guard Titus wasted no further words. It was not the custom in that time to listen to audacious persons of no authority. His huge hands showed white knuckles as he raised his spear to transfix the unlucky person before him. As he was about to deal the death blow, a voice spoke over his shoulder, staying his hand.

"Tago, hold your thrust. It is the Cæsar's wish to speak to the barbarian."

Titus froze to attention as the voice from behind continued: "Know you not the chamber of spotless white marble within these walls? Perhaps"—here the voice became a whisper—"this newcomer would like to see it!"

The guard trembled. Well he knew of that chamber. Many were the nights he had heard the shrieks of the tortured and dying within its confines, despite the thickness of the marble walls. The voice that had spoken was that of Caligula, the wanton butcher, whom all Rome feared and hated. Here at this seemingly peaceful villa the mad Cæsar held nightly debauches so cruel and vicious as to bring shame to his high office. It was whispered that Caligula was the nether-world spirit in the guise of man.

"See that he has no weapons, Tago."

The guard did as his master commanded and stepped aside, having found the barbarian unarmed.

"Come," Caligula spoke, a note of suppressed satisfaction in his voice.

Junga the Hun hesitated not a whit. With an alacrity that astounded the guard, he followed his unholy host. But he slowed and turned his head momentarily. "Wretched man!" he snarled at the Legionary. "You raised your spear against my life this night. I shall not soon forget." Then he slunk after the Emperor, having lost but a few steps by the pause.

With Caligula in the lead, they passed through an anteroom in which a half-dozen guards stood as though carven into the marble walls about them, and thence into a sumptuous audience chamber. The Emperor made his way to a silk-carpeted dais and seated himself upon a throne-like chair of exquisite ivory workmanship.

The barbarian fell to his knees to await the Cæsar's command to speak, but his sharp black eyes bored unflinchingly into the narrowed eyes of the other. He looked upon the face that could smile at a victim's screams of tortured agony, and there was no hint of fear in his manner. Caligula was impressed despite himself.

"Either you are a great fool," spoke the man on the throne, "or you have a silly courage without reason. To attempt entrance to my villa at night is the height of folly. Only by chance I passed the gate during a midnight stroll, and stayed my faithful guard's hand. Furthermore, your people, the Huns, have always been Rome's bitterest enemies. Speak! I will hear a word from you before I take your life."

The ragged clothes of the stranger shook convulsively for a moment, and then the Hun rose slowly to his feet. "You Romans speak of death and bloodshed as if they were nothing. Yet tonight is not my time to die."

"If I command it, you die!" said Caligula, whitening in sudden anger.

"Ah, Cæsar, Master of the World, I come first because I fear not death, and secondly because I have been commanded hither by the Sorceress of Belshewawar. 'Go,' said her High Priest to me, 'go to the south where there is one whose des-

tiny has been written within the Holy Circle. Through you and your priestly knowledge of our secret powers shall he know of Rome's greatest hour.' These were the words spoken to me, and I have come, Cæsar."

Caligula stared at the unflinching black eyes of the barbarian as though seeking to read his mind and soul. "Rome's greatest hour?" He repeated the words almost involuntarily, mystified at their suggestive rhythm. Prompted by a desire to call the wretch before him a wily liar, he yet withheld the words. He was known to have openly sneered at the impotent gods of Rome, but at heart his bloody soul quaked before powers which were reputed to sway the destiny of human life.

Junga the Hun smiled inwardly. He could read the human face like a well-lettered book. Furthermore, there was something else that gave him secret amusement. Caligula had saved his life! Yet had he (Junga) but spoken one word out there by the gate, before the spear was thrown—a powerful sorcery would have seized the guard and rendered him helpless. And that same witchcraft could be used against even an emperor. . . .

"Do you think, barbarian dog," the Emperor broke the silence, "that I, Cæsar of Rome, would forsake the *gods* of Rome?"

"Ah, Cæsar, this is not a religious rite, but a strange power discovered by the Sorceress of Belshewawar that is beyond the knowledge of other men's minds. You can keep your gods. Take my life if you will, too, but I say to you that your destiny of knowing 'Rome's greatest hour' shall then die with me!"

The barbarian's beady eyes gleamed strangely. Caligula sat long in silent thought. The stranger's utter fearlessness and the tremendous portent of his words meant much to the Roman's superstitious nature.

"Have you proof, Priest of Belshewawar?" Already he addressed him respectfully and Junga was not slow to see his victory.

"That I have," Junga spoke confidently.

"Lie not to me, Junga, or your body shall know pain no speaking tongue could describe. I have half a mind yet to take you to the White Chamber and wring the truth from your lips."

"If it please you, Cæsar, take me there now. Such a chamber, I think, will suit me better than any other!"

Caligula started to his feet in astonishment. Then, with a sudden gesture, he led the way out of the room.

THE White Chamber was vaulted and of massive proportions. It was the private sanctum of one of Rome's most heartless kings. On its snow-white marble floor human blood had splashed too often, and its walls had echoed the groans of hellish agonies of torture. Tribune and slave, general and soldier, mistress and harlot, all had seen the dazzling whiteness only as a mock to their horrible death.

Scrubbed daily by slaves, the floor glistened like new-fallen snow in the dancing light of suspended lamps. One not knowing its ghastly history would think the chamber suited for some fair princess, with its priceless statuettes and costly furniture tastefully distributed around the room. But the whole central portion had been reserved for instruments of torture—shuddery things of steel and bronze that contrasted horribly with the other fittings.

Junga the Hun surveyed the chamber without comment, while Caligula watched him surreptitiously, marveling that he had not even blanched at the sight of the machines of torture. The stranger nod-

ded as though he found the chamber suited to his bizarre purpose.

"August Cæsar, at the break of dawn I must have the best mosaic-worker in Rome. And before the noon sun shines upon the Tiber, the Magic Circle of Belshewawar shall be completed here upon this marble floor. Then will I show you I spoke not vain words, and will prove to you the power of the priests of Belshewawar, of whom I am one."

"It shall be done, Junga." The mad Cæsar gloated, for already he believed. His weak, cruel mind had a new toy for its amusement.

It was shortly after the noon repast that a slave announced to the Emperor that all was in readiness in the White Chamber. Glutted with food and reeking from the fumes of overmuch wine, Caligula strode on sandaled feet across the marble floor.

Junga the Hun was not now the ragged barbarian of the night before. Attired in the villa's best choice of costly garments, he might have passed as one of the Roman nobility, except for the alien cast of his yellow, sharp-featured visage. He genuflected before the Cæsar with a smirk that Caligula might have seen if he had had less wine to befuddle his eyes.

"Master of the World!" spoke Junga as the Emperor seated himself on a silken couch. "See there the two posts with bolted shackles so that a man in them stands with legs and arms stretched to the limit. Before them notice the mosaic upon the marble floor in the form of a circle. That is the Holy Circle—yea, the Magic Circle—of Belshewawar, whose designs and symbols only a priest of our cult can read and interpret."

"Ah, then you need a victim!" cried the Roman joyfully.

"That I do, Cæsar. Where formerly human blood was wasted, I shall show you how it can be put to good advantage, enabling me to see many things hidden to ordinary eyes, and even to foretell the future. Through its powers I will bring you—'Rome's greatest hour!' "

Again that strangely suggestive phrase, and, despite the barbarian's bluntness in speaking of his wanton butchery, Caligula's head came up expectantly. He mused silently over its cryptical meaning for a moment.

"What sort of man do you want?" asked the Emperor finally. "Or, if you will—woman!" he added evilly.

"I have already chosen a victim," said Junga quickly. "One called Tago Titus."

The Roman clenched his fist and for a moment resentment stormed over his face. "Tago Titus is a trusted and faithful guard and knows well his duties. Choose another."

"There are a thousand such as Titus in the Roman Legions," returned the barbarian coolly. "You are Master of the World. All men's lives belong to you. Your guard Titus is my choice."

Caligula licked his lips in indecision, and for the first time Junga the Hun showed a sign of perturbation. His withered skin paled so that he resembled more than ever a living corpse. But in the battle of wills, the barbarian won, and with a clap of his hands the Emperor summoned a slave. He was given orders, and a short time later the unfortunate Legionary was dragged in, stripped naked. Brutal attendants of the White Chamber, long calloused to the distasteful work, shackled the former guard to the two posts facing the circle of strange mosaic patterns. The hapless victim seemed resigned to his fate, but seeing the Hun resplendent in a costly toga, leering at him, he burst into speech:

"Heathen snake, this is your doing! May the gods of Rome curse——"

"Silence!" thundered the Emperor.

"My blood upon you both; may destiny bring you with me soon and——"

"Silence!" roared Caligula again. The Legionary set his jaw firmly and relapsed into silence, but his eyes glared accusingly at his master. "You are sentenced to death," went on Caligula coldly, "because you nearly took the life of this man Junga, when my previous instructions had been to conduct him into the portals when he arrived."

Titus' eyes flared dumfoundedly, and then lowered in resignation. The Cæsar's word was law—and truth. Then Caligula tossed his head, and all left the chamber except Junga.

In the appalling silence that followed, broken only by the heavy breathing of the victim, Junga drew a sharp dagger from his girdle and approached the shackled man. The leer of triumph on his mummified face made the Roman soldier wince, though he had been unperturbed at sight of the shining blade.

His face close to that of the soldier, the barbarian hissed softly like a venomous snake: "So, you insulted me, and threatened my life! You see now——" He jerked back with an oath, wiping from his face the material scorn of the man he had brought to his doom.

"Come, let us get on with this," commanded Caligula, who had watched impatiently.

Junga waited no longer, but plunged his dagger into the bowels of the naked man, making a circle so swiftly that it was etched in a fine red line before the entrails burst forth from the body. The barbarian had leaped aside to escape being spattered with blood, and he glided like an evil wraith to the side of the seated Emperor.

With a groan of intense pain, the Legionary's head fell upon his chest. He gritted his teeth and not another sound came from his lips.

"Look, Cæsar!" cried the priest of Belshewawar solemnly. "Look! The shadow of blood creeps toward the Magic Circle! When it reaches the mystic symbols and flows around them, I shall read what portends of importance in the empire." He pointed a scrawny finger at the huge-patterned ring on the snowy marble floor.

CALIGULA looked alternately at the creeping blood and the mosaic of intricate and mysterious figures. There were the age-old symbols of the planets and stars, interspersed with crude outlines of human beings, and the writhing shapes of cabalistic signs. Wavy lines ran through and about the area, connecting one to another with great complexity.

Long the two waited, while the miserable victim prayed silently for a quick death. Gradually the shadow of blood, a darkly red reflection from the vaulted ceiling above, crept on its way to the Holy Circle. Two heartless pairs of eyes followed the moving red reflections, unmindful of the tortured man waiting for an end to his death-agony, and of the revolting mess at his feet, from which flowed the scarlet stain that filled the chamber with a fearful ruby glow.

Suddenly Junga leaped from his perch beside the Cæsar's couch. The long crimson shadow of blood had reached the circle, and because of the mosaic's intricate pattern, it began to form a gruesome design. The barbarian knelt down beside the circle. After minutes of silent contemplation, he arose with a look of intense excitement on his face, and cried: "Look, Cæsar, and mark my words well. The Magic Circle has brought you great news. It tells that the Roman Legions in the north have won a great victory against the barbarians, and the frontiers of the empire are secure. Oh, Cæsar, thus speaks

the Magic Circle of Belshewawar!" And Junga the oracle sank with his face upon the marble floor in proper respect for the man before him.

Caligula sat in silence, speechless. At the words of the other his hands had gripped the arms of the chair until the knuckles glared white. News of such magnitude and importance astounded him. For many days he had worried over the matter, for the Legions of Rome had been beaten back time and time again until it seemed the very frontiers of the empire must succumb before the barbarians. He had shifted generals and military leaders ceaselessly in an effort to find one who might turn the long and doubtful campaign into victory.

The Emperor leaped to his feet, both anger and a mad joy intermingled on his face. Pointing a long finger at the sorcerer, he shouted loudly: "Priest of Belshewawar, you have spoken. This shall prove to me the truth or untruth of your supposed powers. In a few days there will come a courier from the north. If he has other tidings than yours for my ears, your doom is sealed. I shall then know you for a liar."

Caligula strode from the chamber.

Junga, still kneeling on the floor, fairly laughed to himself. His schemes had been crowned with utter success. An adept in the dark art of anthropomancy, he had come to the key city of the world to make use of his evil profession. It had struck him, while pursuing an obscure life as a much-feared sorcerer in a barbaric land, that his powers entitled him to greater honor and fame. He had come to the Cæsar, therewith, intent upon advancing his own interests. The Sorceress of Belshewawar, supposedly his patroness, was but the figure of an impressive myth. Junga had come of his own will.

And how well it had all gone! He had taken a great risk, facing the mad butcher of Rome in his own stronghold and speaking to his own face of his atrocities. But he had cunningly played on the depraved instincts of the Emperor, knowing that would overshadow any audacity on his part.

Junga rose to his feet. Already engrossed with plans for a glorious future as Caligula's honored soothsayer, he straightened the folds of his toga and stepped toward the doorway. But a low sound brought him to a pause, startled. It had been Titus, the guard, moaning in his death-agony. The barbarian glanced at his mutilated victim, shrugged disdainfully, and made for the doorway, suddenly aware of the stench of freshly spilled blood.

"Junga! Junga of the Huns!"

The barbarian stopped and turned half fearfully in his victim's direction. Titus, with the shadows of death in his eyes, had raised his head from his chest. Those eyes, sharp and accusing, focused till they met those of the heartless man of the north.

"Junga of the Huns! Do you hear me?"

Perspiration started from the sorcerer's forehead and he tried to break away from the sudden spell that seemed to have bound his feet—tried to escape the accusing tones of the agony-ridden voice of the man he had murdered.

"You have done evil, Junga," came from the pain-twisted lips of the dying Roman. Soft though the tones were, the words rang through the vaulted room like funeral chimes. "Your evil shall live after you—but before that it shall compass your own doom!"

The barbarian stared speechless in terror and saw the eyes of the suffering man turn to the mosaic ring between them. What could he be seeing there? Why did those eyes, swiftly glazing in the mists of death, light up as though having seen

something in the configurations on the marble floor?

"Look!"

The word came almost sharply from the disemboweled victim. "My blood—see? It seeps into the Holy Circle. It is forming a design—a portent of the future. I can read that sign! It says—that you—fiendish slayer of—innocent men are—warned of your black gods—that you—Caligula—doom——"

The agonizing voice ceased and the great head of Titus the Legionary dropped to his chest. Junga the Hun fled from the room with hands to his ears, vainly trying to shut from them the words he had heard.

IT HAD happened that several days before, there had come to the ears of Caligula the tale of a ravishingly beautiful female captive of Egypt, who was in the hands of one of his generals in Rome. He had forthwith decided to see her and perhaps take her for his own. The fair creature was brought to his villa, and by chance, it fell upon the day after the courier from the north, coming with news of victory for Rome, vindicated the sorcery of Junga.

The northern wizard saw the coming of her litter from the window of his room. Attracted by her manner and poise even from that distance, as she stepped gracefully from the vehicle in the courtyard, Junga contrived to be in the hall as the retinue conducted her to the presence of the Emperor. Stunned by her beauty, so perfect in contrast to the gnarled, unshapely women of his own hardy, northern race, Junga silently vowed then and there that Caligula should not have her, but he himself. Already he counted himself an authority in the villa, to whom nothing was impossible. Knowing he must work fast if he would be the first to have her, as was his fierce desire from the moment he saw her, the barbarian dispatched a slave to the Cæsar with a message.

An hour later, in the early evening, a summons called him to the Emperor's reception room, but not before Junga had seen the beautiful slave conducted to the guarded quarters in the rear of the villa where Caligula's loves of the day were kept in luxury and idleness.

Junga bowed low before the Cæsar, who gave him permission to speak. "August Cæsar, we must again watch the shadows of blood creep over the lineaments of the Holy Circle of Belshewawar. But an hour ago in my room there came to me a message borne by certain spirits from my patroness, saying we must read the first of the portents that shall bring you knowledge of 'Rome's greatest hour'."

"So be it," said Caligula. "Tomorrow evening——"

"Nay, but it must be this very evening," cut in Junga softly.

Caligula waved an imperious hand. "Tomorrow evening, I say. I have just laid eyes upon the most beautiful creature ever to draw breath in the land of Egypt, and tonight——"

"And tonight," again interrupted Junga, "must you forego your carnal pleasure to hear the prophecies of Belshewawar."

Caligula leaped to his feet angrily. "But it is my will," he fairly roared, "that tonight the fair Egyptian——"

"And who knows?—the Holy Circle of Belshewawar may have something to say about this most gorgeous captive! It is best, Cæsar, that you listen to the wisdom of the sorceress who sent me, before you do in folly those things you contemplate without regard to the future."

The firm, quiet voice of the barbarian, delivered in sepulchral tones, played upon the superstitions of the Emperor. As a result, later in the evening, they again met in the White Chamber.

The same gruesome rite that had taken place a week before was enacted, the victim a guard accused of having fallen asleep on watch. Not quite as stoical as his predecessor, this man screamed aloud as the plunging knife searched his vitals. His powerful body writhed and knotted in the grip of the gyves, and each throb of agony brought piteous groans to his lips.

But the two archfiends who had brought him to that ghastly end showed little interest or compassion in his suffering, except that Caligula turned scornful eyes upon him and said that most men died with far more pain in the infamous White Chamber. The Cæsar then turned his undivided attention to the winy reflection from the vaults above that slowly crept upon the Magic Circle of Belshewawar.

Apparently in a semi-trance while deciphering the symbols of the mosaic, Junga the Hun, mumbling in a strange cadence, stared with beady eyes at the mystic signs, and suddenly leaped to his feet.

"Alas, Cæsar! It is not always that the Holy Circle tells that which the heart desires. For it reveals now that you should not have this fair creature from the south!"

Caligula rose from his couch, enraged. "Do you dare to command a Cæsar what and what not to crave? By the throne of Jove, you go too far. I will have the Egyptian girl, whatever your Holy Circle says."

As Junga stood silent and arrogant in his total lack of fear at a Cæsar's mighty wrath, Caligula calmed down, asking: "And why, Priest of Belshewawar, must I deny myself the possession of a mere woman?"

"Harken, Cæsar," answered Junga quietly. "The Egyptian maid you so desire, the magic of Belshewawar tells me, is tainted—tainted with leprosy!"

Caligula turned ashy and fairly staggered back to his seat. The barbarian continued, his eyes narrowing craftily: "No one knows it, as the disease is in that stage where outward signs are hardly detectable, but none the less, it is there. If you will dispatch your physician to her to conduct a close examination, he will confirm my prediction."

The Emperor nodded, too stunned to speak, and they parted.

A CLOSELY muffled figure stood in the shadow of a tethering-post in the courtyard, nervous and impatient. At times it peered carefully beyond the post where the moonlight flooded the flagstones, and as often it would turn its head backward where a darker shadow seemed inked into the gloom-ridden corner beside the little-used stable entrance of the villa.

Suddenly a second figure stirred in the shadows along the one wall, and resolved itself into a man swathed from head to feet in a faded toga and tattered woolen scarf. The watcher melted to the side of the concealing post and waited silently.

"Hsst! Bogamus! Are you there? It is I, Junga!"

The watcher thereupon stepped from the shadow. "Be quiet, on your life! This is business that calls for more care than daring."

Junga the Hun, for it was he in the nondescript clothing, grunted softly, it may have been in derision or acquiescence, and came close to the other. "And the—our merchandise, it is here all right?"

Bogamus the physician pointed to the impenetrable darkness of the stable corner and nodded. "That which you wish is there; but by the gods, now I wish——"

"Wish what, Bogamus?"

"——that I had not agreed to it. Ca-

ligula is a wicked man, a devil when wrathful."

"But he is stupid," Junga said quickly. "Fear not, Bogamus; none but you and I know that the Egyptian girl is untainted and pure. Only we two shall know that she is yet here at the villa, accessible to me. Tomorrow Caligula shall see a veiled woman hurried from the villa to be exiled from human society. He will quickly forget the matter when the captain of the guards reports she is gone from this place."

Bogamus shook his head, worried and frowning. "But only the gods can save us if someone be suspicious and raise the veil to find another woman in the Egyptian's place."

"What brave man will touch the veil of a leper?" Junga's voice reflected great confidence. "But come, we waste good time in idle talk. Lead the way to my rooms. I shall carry the—merchandise."

Bogamus in the lead, Junga staggering behind with the limp and bound figure of a girl in his arms, they passed via the stable entrance into a dark corridor that led upward on ramps of sturdy wood. It being the hour before dawn, the villa was silent in sleep and there was none to question the two wary evil-doers.

In the week that Junga had been at the villa, he had already cast his eyes upon the various people in the Cæsar's service, with the possibility of contacting some of them as helpers in his nefarious operations. Bogamus the physician, gaunt and avaricious, he had quickly gathered to his evil fold with the promise of that lure that knows no honesty—gold.

Finally a stray candle-beam lighted their feet as they gained the living-quarters of the villa, and Bogamus parted from the barbarian after seeing him safely in his rooms. Junga the Hun laid the unconscious, drugged girl on a couch, and strode to the doorway. After listening for long minutes in the utter silence, and assured that no one had detected him and followed, he closed the door, shot home its bolt, and turned to the girl lying pale and alluring in the flicker of the candle. In his face grew a concentrated lust that transformed his natural ugliness into utter bestiality.

In the week that followed, Junga and Caligula forgathered three times in the white chamber, staining the marble floor each time with the blood of innocent men, doomed by command of the Cæsar. The Priest of Belshewawar, skilled in his art, read from the Magic Circle omens and portents that related mainly to Caligula's northern operations in extending the empire. The mad Cæsar, engrossed in his superstition, became convinced that the magic of the barbarian sorcerer would eventually lead him to "Rome's greatest hour."

Junga, in turn, knew there was to be no such fantastic climax in their relationship: it was his purpose merely to lead the trusting Emperor on, and make his favor secure. But one thing bothered the cunning man of magic: try as he would he could not forget those fateful words Titus the Legionary had said with his dying breath. Had the revelations of his dark magic been able to open his eyes to his own future, the barbarian would have been yet more disturbed. . . .

It was not many days later that a guard came to Caligula with a strange tale of what he had glimpsed in a window of Junga's private quarters. The guard had been a close friend of the deceased Titus, and had gained his information more by design than accident. The daring fellow had climbed, at risk of life and limb, to the only vantage-point, high on a peaked gable, from which one could see into the chambers of the sorcerer. It had been well worth the while, for the in-

formation he imparted startled the Emperor not a little. Caligula spent an hour in deep thought, his black brows furrowed in a thunderous scowl. Then he called to him a trusted steward, to whom he gave certain whispered instructions, enjoining him to secrecy.

That very night Caligula himself repaired to the White Chamber, and not long afterward the door opened to reveal two of his attendants carrying between them the struggling form of Bogamus the physician. The attendants stood him on his feet before the couch of the Cæsar and stepped back a pace with brawny arms folded.

Trembling in every limb, Bogamus attempted to put on a righteous front before the Emperor's accusing eye. "Hail, august Cæsar! For what reason am I, your faithful physician, thus dragged to the—White Chamber? I told these rough fellows they had made a mistake. Will the Cæsar give me permission to leave?"

"I would talk with you, Bogamus," Caligula said, transfixing the terror-stricken man with ominous eyes. "Some ten days ago there was brought to this villa a captive Egyptian maid. You remember?"

"Yes, Cæsar."

Caligula said nothing for a long moment. Then: "Where is she now?" he suddenly shot out.

Bogamus, licking dry lips, answered as confidently as his shaken nerves would allow: "If you will but recall, Cæsar, she was tainted with leprosy and by your own orders exiled from this place."

Caligula arched his heavy brows and straightened a sleeve of his tunic. "That is your story, Bogamus?"

"Y-yes, august Cæsar."

Suddenly, at a wave of the Emperor's hand, the two stalwarts grasped the physician by the arms, and unmindful of his sudden shriek, dragged him off his feet and carried him away from the couch. With practised familiarity they strapped him by wrists and ankles to an apparatus gleaming with much metal. Bogamus came out of a momentary faint to find himself suspended horizontally four feet off the floor. Unable to see underneath himself, his mind sickened at the thought of what devilish instrument might be there. His eyes focused then on the leering, insane face of Caligula and he cried loudly for mercy.

"Strip him!"

The mad Emperor strode to a position where he could peer into the drawn and frightened face of his erstwhile trusted physician.

"Bogamus, you have lied to me and deceived me. The fair Egyptian was *not* taken from this place! She has been observed in the chamber of another supposedly faithful servant of mine. Now tell me, traitor, was the girl tainted with leprosy or not?"

"No, no!" cried the now naked and trembling man. "It was but a trick. Release me, and I will tell you all! You do not have to torture me! I will tell all!"

"You will tell all now, Bogamus," grated the Emperor, with a great anger clouding his face. "Who incited you to play this deception?"

The physician rolled his eyes fearfully, unable to see any way of not being revealed a traitor and double traitor. "Junga! Junga the Hun! He wanted the fair Egyptian. He plotted to get her. In his cunning and lust, he came to me. He cast a spell over me. I swear it, Cæsar, he played his magic on me. Never of myself would I have—it was Junga—he—not I——"

His suspicions suddenly confirmed, the boiling wrath of the mad Cæsar exploded. With a roar of violent curses, he turned from the babbling physician and his incoherent pleas for mercy and for-

giveness, and jerked a finger at his minions.

Without a word one of the slaves stooped beside a large wooden wheel whose outer edge, strewn with a score of jagged-edged knives, revolved beneath the unprotected spine of the doomed man. Grasping the crank handle with which it was equipped, he slowly turned it. Its axle uncentered, the wheel's larger arc reared from the floor and swung its freight of knives upward.

Bogamus the physician screamed in sudden pain as a knife flicked his flesh underneath, and arched his body desperately so that the next revolution of the wheel left him untouched. The attendant methodically turned the crank, and Caligula looked on in vengeful gloating, knowing that in a short time the straining man would have no further strength to arch his back and then he would sag, so that the knives——

Two hours later the mad Cæsar left the White Chamber as the last echoes of screams and groans had died away.

SITTING resplendent before a table loaded with delicious foods and rare wines in the vaulted White Chamber, Caligula Cæsar drummed his fingers on the arms of the chair. At times his cruel face lighted with a smile of anticipation.

It was apparent that he awaited someone, and at last the door swung aside and two guards ushered in Junga, the Priest of Belshewawar, sumptuously clothed in contrast to the corpse-like lineaments of his face. The attendants retreated at a signal from their master, and Junga stood a moment hesitant, surprized at the sight of food and drink in such a place.

"Come, my Junga," cried Caligula jovially. "This night shall we dine in our citadel of sport. I have for our rites tonight a victim whose heart's blood shall surely tell when and how Rome shall know its greatest hour. Come, a grateful Cæsar invites you to dine with him!"

Unsuspecting, the barbarian sorcerer came forward, and upon his parched and wrinkled skin a smile of satisfaction grew. To dine with a Cæsar! This honor had not yet been his.

Caligula raised a goblet of wine as Junga seated himself. "This is the choicest vintage of the Carduc Hills. Drink, my incomparable soothsayer, and the toast —to what the Holy Circle will this night reveal."

Junga started in suspicion at this, and darted a quick glance at the Emperor. But seeing the Cæsar's goblet already upraised, a veritable royal command to drink, he drew up his own goblet and drank deep of it. A moment later a cry escaped from his lips. His arms fell helpless to his side and the golden goblet crashed to the floor to taint with its dark red wine the snow-white purity.

The color drained from his swarthy face so that he looked like an actual corpse, a dead man sitting in a chair with living eyes—eyes that glared a confusion of emotions: hatred, rage, and above all, a horrible fear. His voice, as if from the grave, croaked: "You have poisoned me!"

"By the crown of Olympus, but the Priest of Belshewawar has again guessed the truth. What evil magic gives you this strange power?" Caligula's voice hissed mockingly as he burst into a spasm of triumphant laughter. Then his face became stern and he shook a clenched fist in the barbarian's face. "A rare poison that robs men of their strength, and sorcerers of their supernatural powers. Weave a spell if you can," he taunted, "and you shall find it dying unborn in your own treacherous heart."

Clapping his hands, Caligula arose as the two attendants came running up, and ordered them to shackle the barbarian to the gyve-posts before the Holy Circle of

Belshewawar. As quickly as they had come, the slaves left, and Caligula faced the horror-stricken eyes of Junga.

"But five people knew that you have made a fool of Cæsar. Three of them are gone already: Bogamus, the Egyptian maid and one of my guards. You and I —are left!"

With deliberate eagerness, the mad Emperor drew from his girdle a sharp dagger, while Junga stared speechless and powerless, for the poison was truly an antidote against witchcraft. "Look, Junga! There before you lies the mosaic ring whose mysterious convolutions and signs reveal great secrets when the shadows of human blood creep over them. What more fitting than that *your* blood should now be spilled for the purpose!"

"Who are you," croaked the voice of Junga suddenly, "that dare to threaten the life of one of Belshewawar's priests? Beware, for the Sorceress who sent me here is jealous of her own."

Caligula drew back in awed fear, but only for a moment. "Bah! I have no dread of her power, for I am Master of the World, all-powerful and protected of the gods of Rome. Furthermore, will the Sorceress of Belshewawar avenge the death of a priest of her cult who has proved a traitor to his gods?"

With these words Caligula came closer to the doomed man, dagger extended, gloating at the intense fear that shone from his victim's anguished eyes. One quick motion and swing of the arm and Junga the Hun became as those others had been under his own ministrations.

Turning his back upon the man shrieking in agony, Caligula strode to his table and drained a goblet of wine. "You see, heathen and traitor, that although the poison robs you of motion and of your black skill in magic, it does not deaden the capacity for pain. Now let us watch the shadows of blood, and see what the Holy Circle will tell."

No longer a man, but a monster, the mad Cæsar taunted the dying man, exacting vengeance for the trickery that had lost to him a beautiful woman. Caligula might have forgiven him the act had he been a Roman, and had he been a soothsayer of years of standing. But for a wretched barbarian to steal from the Cæsar, within three weeks of being there, a desirable woman—that was unforgivable.

THE scarlet light that rebounded from the vaults above slanted gradually toward the mosaic ring from the pool of blood at Junga's feet. In an ecstasy of pain that groaning could not alleviate, Junga fell to silence except for labored, choking breath, and stared fixedly at the shadows of blood writhing over the symbols of the Magic Circle.

"I will read the meaning of the oracle of Belshewawar," gleefully cried the Emperor of Rome. "There, it says Junga is a thief, one who thought to rob a Cæsar. It says he has murdered innocent men, and despoiled a woman whose feet he was not worthy to kiss. And for these things, sorcerer though you are, death has been your lot. And what more does it say?" leered Caligula insanely. "It says that I, Caius Caligula Cæsar, shall know 'Rome's greatest hour'—with your death!"

The barbarian's eyes flared wide suddenly. "That, Cæsar of blood, is blasphemy against my gods!"

The words rang ominously through the vaulted White Chamber, and Junga fixed his eyes intently on the mosaic ring before his mutilated body. Seeing this, and shaken by those portentous words, Caligula felt an icy finger touch his heart. Almost he wished he had not tampered with the powers of Junga's alien gods.

His eyes turned involuntarily to the Magic Circle, wondering what could be written there. Then he saw that there *was* something there—shadows that should not be. . . .

Caligula whirled and in that instant knew his doom. A dozen men with drawn swords and daggers were behind his back, their faces reflecting none of the reverence that should have been there for their Emperor. With cries of "murderer" and "wanton butcher" they rushed upon him, and before he could cry out, a dozen daggers plunged into his body. He fell mortally wounded as they rushed out again.

A silence as of the grave fell upon the White Chamber. The shackled barbarian sorcerer stared with wide eyes, forgetful of his great agony, for he had witnessed the assassination of a Roman Emperor.

A groan came from the murdered man, as he stirred his hacked body in a growing pool of blood. Weakly he raised his head. His eyes encountered those of the barbarian.

Junga's lips opened, and his voice, already vibrant with the rattle of death, came forth prophetically: "'Rome's greatest hour'—has come! For Caligula, the mad, murdering Cæsar, is no more!"

A harsh chuckle, ghostly with the tones of death, reverberated from the white marble walls as the shadows of blood slowly crept in deepening shades over a circle of strange mosaic patterns.

Dear Ghosts

By CLARENCE EDWIN FLYNN

Dear ghosts I have that haunt my way,
And yet I feel no fear;
I count them friends, and hold the day
Brighter that they are near.

There are the ghosts of happy hours
That long ago have fled,
Yet come like resurrected flowers
To say they are not dead.

There are the ghosts of hopes I prized,
And thought them done and o'er,
Returning, though unrealized,
As lovely as of yore.

There are the ghosts of journeys done
Long, long ago, but yet,
Despite the distance I have gone,
I can not quite forget.

Lord of the Lamia

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

John Tane, archeologist, was not afraid of man or beast, but he faced a baffling, sinister mystery in ancient Cairo

The Story Thus Far

JOHN TANE, young archeologist and explorer, rents a house in Cairo from Doctor Schneider, a German archeologist, intending to marry and bring his bride there to live. But scarcely has he paid over the rent money when a Moslem funeral procession enters the place. Despite his protests, the coffin, presumably containing the body of a saint, is walled up in one end of the main reception room.

That night, Tane and his servant are drugged by the doctor, but the former awakens in his bedroom, and goes downstairs. In a room next to the one in which the saint was interred, he sees a Persian reading a strange litany before a niche lighted by two candles. He addresses the stranger courteously, but the Persian attacks him.

Tane wins the fight, and the Persian flees. Then the archeologist examines the scroll the intruder was reading, and finds it contains a magic formula written in ancient Egyptian characters. He reads it aloud, and finds that it is a charm for raising the dead. As he puts down the scroll, he sees a coffin inside the niche, and realizes it is the one brought into the house a few hours before. The lid is off, and instead of a corpse, he sees that it contains a mummy-case on which is depicted a beautiful girl. He removes the lid of the mummy-case, and finds a cobra wrapped in muslin bandages of tremendous age. Curiously he unwraps the bandages, and finds the serpent in a perfect state of preservation, its head resting in a golden diadem.

The cobra suddenly comes to life. One candle burns out, and the snake knocks over the other, leaving the room in darkness. Tane lights a match and discovers that the cobra is gone, but that Doctor Schneider has been knocked out, and is lying beneath a pile of rugs and cushions on the divan. The doctor persuades him to look for the serpent, and he finds that the doorkeeper has been slain. When he returns to the room, the niche has been closed, and the panel appears to have a solid wall behind it. The doctor tells him the thing was all a drug dream. They argue, and the doctor goes out, returning with four native policemen, accusing him of murdering the doorman. Tane fights the policemen, but is overcome by Hagg Nadeem, an Egyptian official, who places him under arrest but courteously invites him to spend the night in his own home instead of the vermin-infested jail.

The story continues:

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6. *The Visitation*

IN ITS arrangement, the house of Hagg Nadeem was quite similar to the one Tane had rented some hours before, but much more luxuriously appointed. As he sat in the reception room, sipping a sherbet and smoking one of his host's long oriental cigarettes, his eyes strayed from one to another of the priceless objects of antique art which the room contained.

"Horrified unbelief written on his features, the shaykh glanced at the hideous thing that had clamped on his wrist."

"I had not heard that, among other things, you were a connoisseur of antiques," said Tane.

"These things? Mere trifles. Some day, *inshallah,* I will show you my private museum." He smiled his sweet, dreamy smile. "But now, *effendi,* I should be infinitely obliged to you if you would relate to me, in detail, everything that happened after you called on Doctor Schneider yesterday afternoon, to rent his house. I know that you are weary, and need rest. At the same time, please realize that you are accused of a serious crime. If you are innocent, the quickest way you can aid me in learning the truth is by telling all you know."

"I have nothing to conceal, though some of the things I have to relate may sound fantastic—even unbelievable," Tane replied.

"Please let me be the judge of that, *effendi.* Proceed."

The American related his story in detail—his payment of the gold to Doctor Schneider, his awakening near midnight with the unmistakable signs of having been drugged, his encounter with the hawk-nosed Persian, the incident of the scroll, the mummy-case and the serpent,

his finding of the injured doctor, and the latter's subsequent treachery.

"Did you tell Doctor Schneider that you had read the scroll aloud over the mummy-case and then unwrapped the haje?" asked Nadeem when he had finished.

"I did," Tane replied, "but he evidently thought that part of it all a hashish dream. He almost succeeded in convincing me that this was the case, also—would have done so, in fact, if it hadn't been for this." Reaching into his pocket, he produced the bit of candle wax he had found on the floor and passed it to his host.

The latter sniffed at it and tested its hardness with his thumb-nail.

"Looks genuine enough," he said. "I'll have it analyzed and checked microscopically, though, to make sure."

"To make sure of what? What do you mean?"

"This," said the *hagg,* "is evidently a bit of one of the candles used by the high priests of a certain secret sect of ancient times, when practising a branch of their black art—specifically that of raising the dead. These candles were made from the fat of virgins secretly sacrificed before the crocodile god, Sebek. This fat was mixed with beeswax in which had been incorporated several potent drugs and a compound of aromatic resins, gums and essential oils."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Tane. "You don't mean that innocent young women were actually slaughtered to make these candles! Why, I have been studying the ancient records for years, and never heard of such a thing. If this is true, I'll have to admit that you are far better informed than I on the doings of the ancient Egyptians, despite my years of study and research."

"There are reasons why I should be so informed," replied Nadeem, passing him the gold-and-ivory cigarette box. "It happens that I am directly descended from a high priest of Sebek. Despite the fact that I am a Muslim, a believer in the one true God, as have been my ancestors for many generations, the ancient documents of my forebears have been passed down from seventh son to seventh son intact. It appears that I have been the first of the line with the temerity to break the ancient seals and examine them, since the conversion of the family to the faith of *al Islam.*"

Tane selected and lighted a cigarette. "You have no idea," he said, "how intensely interesting all this is to me. I presume that none but a seventh son of a seventh son of your house would be permitted to examine the documents."

Nadeem smiled his sweet, pensive smile. "Unfortunately, that is quite true. In fact, there is an ancient curse laid upon the custodian who allows them to fall into alien hands—a curse which would bring a horrible doom not only upon the desecrator, but upon my family in all its branches."

"And you believe in the efficacy of the curse?"

NADEEM shrugged. "I should dislike to test its power. There have been numerous instances, within your memory and mine, in which people have suffered death, sudden and inexplicable, after defying such a curse. It will be a long time before the world forgets what happened to the desecrators of the tomb of Tut-ankh-Amen, son of Amen-hetep the Fourth, which was protected by such a curse."

"It is my belief that these, and all other similar instances, can be traced to natural causes," said Tane.

"Mine also," replied the Egyptian.

"Has it ever occurred to you that such a curse might operate through natural channels?"

"Can't say I ever thought of it in that way."

"In many things the ancients were better informed than are we," Nadeem said. "And while I grant you that there is nothing really supernatural, that all things must take place in accord with the laws of Nature, or Allah, it is my belief that these ancient priests and master magicians—the genuine adepts—were in possession of a number of scientific truths which gave them tremendous power over the uninitiated, and which have not been rediscovered by our modern scientists. I do not claim that they really understood all the natural laws they put into effect in performing their so-called miracles and feats of magic. However, they had much leisure for study and experiment, and learning that certain causes produced certain mysterious effects, made use of them."

"I can't think of any application of natural law which would explain my weird experience of this evening," said Tane. "I would prefer to believe that the greater part of it was a drug dream, but the presence of the carbon spots in the top of the niche and a bit of candle wax on the rug is evidence that at least part of the experience was real. It is difficult for me to believe that a serpent, dead for five thousand years, should suddenly come to life and crawl away because of the reading of a bit of mummery over it, accompanied by the burning of two candles made from the fat of virgins. That's too preposterous for any sane man to swallow."

"A true scientist," said Hagg Nadeem, "weighs every fact with which he comes in contact before drawing a conclusion. If he is in search of truth, he can not afford to ignore a single fact, however absurd or illogical it may seem. In this case, you are basing your assumption on the hypothesis that it was a real haje you saw and handled, when what you actually saw may have been something entirely different, temporarily assuming the shape of a haje."

"That *would* be preposterous."

"Not necessarily. You are, I take it, familiar with the Lamia legends."

"Of course. A great English poem was based on them."

"I know. *Lamia*, by Keats. His picture of Lamia, the brightly colored female serpent that transforms herself into a beautiful girl, conforms to the ancient belief—or superstition, if you will—of the deadly, beautiful creatures called Lamias, half woman, half serpent, who visited men in their sleep, sometimes to make love to them, sometimes to drain them of their vitality, and often, in the end, to slay them, drinking their blood or devouring their flesh."

"A superstition undoubtedly evoked by the desire dreams of some ancient, lovelorn swains," said Tane.

"Not necessarily. It is recorded that one of these creatures once ruled all Libya. In fact, her name was Lamia, and that is why all such have subsequently been called 'Lamias'."

"I've heard of that, also," Tane told him. "It is said that, to this day, Greek mothers frighten their children into obedience by mentioning her name."

"Precisely. And it seems that a belief which has endured so persistently through the ages must have some foundation in fact. Perhaps there were, and are, such things as Lamias."

"At least the ancient scroll and crown I saw, if I really saw them, seem to confirm the fact that there was once a queen of Libya by that name, who claimed to be

the daughter of a god and a royal princess."

"That is true." Hagg Nadeem snuffed his cigarette and stood up. "And it follows that since you read the scroll and unwrapped the serpent, you may have an opportunity to learn whether there was or is such a creature, and if so, whether she will live up to the promise made on the scroll, to become the slave of the man who awakens her. I will leave you, now, to a well-earned rest. Since I can not invite you up into my hareem, this will serve as your bedroom. Sleep as late as you like. The guards and servants will have orders not to disturb you. If you have need of anything, clap your hands. And I'll see you tomorrow. Just now, I have important work to do. *Hadrak.*"

"*Ma salam,*" Tane replied.

As soon as his host disappeared through the doorway, the American went to the window and peered out. A sentry, with rifle and fixed bayonet, paced just below him. He went to the courtyard door and looked through the interstice between the curtains. Another guard stood there. A third door led into a narrow hallway, lighted by the yellow rays of a brass lamp. And seated at the end of the hall with every evidence of alertness was a third armed guard.

Returning to the diwan, Tane sat down. He decided that an attempt to escape would be foolish, futile, and dangerous. After all, where could he go to help his case in any way? To escape to the American consulate now would do him no good, even if it were possible of accomplishment. He would be traced and compelled to return to answer the murder charge, anyway. The diwan was most inviting, and he was very tired and exceedingly sleepy. With a yawn, he began to undress. A few moments later, clad only in his shorts, he blew out the light and settled down among the cushions and coverlets. Shortly thereafter, he fell asleep.

It seemed to Tane that he had scarcely closed his eyes in slumber, when he suddenly became wide awake. The moon had set, and the room was shrouded in that deceptive darkness which precedes the dawn, the various objects looming up as bulky shadows. He could see nothing amiss, yet he had an inexplicable premonition of danger—of some alien presence in the room. He held his breath and listened. A faint rustling sound came from the mashrabiyeh window, and he strained his eyes through the gloom to learn the cause. Suddenly he detected a movement, a wriggling sinuous motion through one section of the lattice. Good Heaven! It was a snake—a huge, mottled haje with scales that gleamed dully!

He strove to cry out, but could not make a sound. Then he tried to sit up, preparatory to running out the door and calling the guard, but found that he could not so much as move a finger. Such experiences had been his before, in dreams, but this, he was convinced, was no dream. The snake slithered down from the lattice and disappeared in the gloom beneath the window. The rustling sound now continued on the floor, and the fact that Tane could no longer see the reptile, made its approach immensely more terrifying. Again he made a desperate attempt to shout or move, but in vain. A cold sweat bedewed his forehead, and he was oppressed by a feeling of suffocation. The suspense of lying there, waiting for death to strike him from the shadows, was horrible, enervating. He almost wished the haje would sink its venomous fangs into his flesh and end it all. It was thus that the incomparable Cleopatra had found swift surcease from her troubles, ages before.

In breathless silence he waited for that hooded head to rear itself above the edge of the diwan. But instead of the serpent's head he was suddenly aware of something light-colored, and faintly luminous, moving upward from the floor. It was a pair of plumes—the two feathers of truth! They nodded above a diadem, fronted by a uræus with glittering jeweled eyes. And beneath the diadem, there slowly materialized the face and form of the girl he had seen depicted on the lid of the mummy-case. She appeared to be draped in something white and filmy, which revealed every line of her slender, perfect figure.

"Who are you? What are you?" he tried to ask. But his voice would not function. He could not so much as whisper.

Although he could not hear his own voice, the figure seemed to hear it—or read his thoughts—for she answered him, her voice low and musical. And the language she used was that of ancient Egypt.

"Don't you know me, lord of my awakening? I am Lamia, once proud Queen of Libya, and now—your slave. I am still weak, for this is the first night, and so I can not serve you yet. But I will gain strength in the manner you and all adepts know, and then you may command my service and my power. You are in great danger, my master—such danger as will tax our combined efforts to thwart. I go now, to gain strength, but I will return and watch over you."

Slowly, soundlessly, she sank downward until only the nodding plumes showed above the rim of the diwan. Then these disappeared. Shortly thereafter there was a rustling sound at the window. He caught a flash of gleaming scales on a serpentine body that wriggled swiftly through the lattice-work.

For some time Tane lay there, listening. But the only sounds that came to his ears were the heavy tread of the sentry below the window, and the occasional matutinal crowing of the restless cocks of the neighborhood. Suddenly he discovered that he could move once more. He sat up, found his matches, and lighted the lamp. Its yellow rays shone to every corner of the room and revealed—nothing.

Sleep, he found, was impossible. He smoked cigarette after cigarette in a fruitless effort to soothe his jangled nerves. Presently, after what seemed ages of waiting, the dawn came. He blew out the lamp, settled down once more on the diwan, and presently fell into a troubled sleep.

7. *Kidnapped*

TANE awoke and sat up, bathed in perspiration. He glanced at his watch. It was twelve o'clock, and the air quivered in the stifling noonday heat. Then a huge negro, who had been standing before one of the curtained doorways, said:

"I have drawn a cold bath for you, *sidi*. Will you step this way?"

"Will I!" Tane leaped to his feet, and followed the black giant through the doorway, down a hallway, and into a modern, tiled bathroom. A cold tub and a brisk rub-down made him feel like a new man. The negro brought him shaving things, and when he had finished, came in with his clothing, freshly pressed. As soon as he was dressed, the black man said:

"This way, *sidi*."

The servant conducted him back into the reception room. There he saw Hagg Nadeem seated on a diwan with a taboret before him.

"*Salam aleykum*," he greeted.

"*Aleykum salam*," replied Nadeem. "Will you breakfast with me? I, too, have just arisen."

"With pleasure, *hagg*."

The Egyptian clapped his hands, and a servant entered with a huge tray containing iced watermelon, eggs, toast, grilled fish, and a pot of spiced, sweetened coffee.

"*Bismillah*," said the *hagg*, piously, as he attacked his watermelon. "With health and appetite."

For some time they addressed themselves to their food in silence, after the oriental custom. Then, after they had rinsed their hands beneath a ewer brought by a servant, dried them, and lighted cigarettes, Nadeem said:

"I just received some good news for you from the kadi. It seems that Doctor Schneider appeared this morning and withdrew his accusation of murder against you. He said that he, too, had been drugged last evening, in addition to the blow on the head, but that now, since his faculties are clearer, he believes your story about the Persian."

"Drugged. So that's it. I wondered why he acted so queerly last evening. By the way, I had a curious experience after I retired. Sort of a vision, or dream. I seemed to be awake, and yet I couldn't make a move or a sound."

"Interesting. And what did you see?"

Tane told him.

"*Waha!*" exclaimed the Egyptian. "And you call that a dream?"

"What do you mean?"

"At midnight, in the full of the moon, you read the mystic incantation aloud over the mummy-case of the ancient Queen of Libya, by the light of two magic candles. Then you opened the case and unwrapped the mummy. It is prophesied in the ancient writings that the man who does these things becomes Lamia's lord."

"Then you believe that what I thought I did and saw last night was real?"

"As real as this bit of candle wax, which is your only physical evidence. Yet small and insignificant as it is, it is enough to disprove the drug-dream theory, for such dreams do not materialize substance."

"That is true enough. Then you think that I am——"

"Lord of the Lamia."

Tane looked at him in astonishment. "I can't believe it. I won't. It's all too incredible—too uncanny. Such things can't be."

"It may be that future developments will prove you wrong," said the *hagg*, solemnly. "We know nothing of the natures of these creatures called Lamias, or their powers or tenacity to life. Cold-blooded animals are notoriously difficult to kill, particularly serpents. There is an authentic record of a frog found alive in the wall of an old building, where it had been imprisoned without food or water for many years."

"But," said Tane, "assuming that a serpent did remain in a state of suspended animation for five thousand years, you still have the inexplicable phenomenon of that serpent changing to the semblance of a woman and returning to its original form, all in the course of a few moments."

"Even that," said Hagg Nadeem, "is not so difficult to believe as it might appear on first thought. I take it that you, like most scientists, hold to the theory of organic evolution."

"We use it as a working hypothesis," Tane replied. "Things happen as if it were true."

"Exactly. You believe that your ancestors in the dim and distant past were once reptiles."

"So it would appear."

"Even the science of embryology furnishes analogical proof of this. For, at one stage of its development, the human embryo resembles a young salamander."

"That is true."

"You will grant me, then, that the evolutionists believe a reptile gradually turned into a human being—say over a period of many millions of years. And the embryologists tell us that a reptilian form, under proper conditions, becomes a human form in the course of a few months."

"Of course."

"Then, *effendi,* I submit that there is but one difference between what your scientists tell us, and what you say you witnessed last night. That difference is 'time'. You saw, or appeared to see, a reptile become a human being. The evolutionists say this *has* happened. The embryologists say it *still* happens. Yet you did not believe the evidence of your senses because it happened so quickly."

"But," said Tane, "the girl appeared to change back to the serpent form once more."

"Why not? Combine two gases, oxygen and hydrogen, in the correct proportion, and under the proper conditions, and they become water. Treat the water with an electrical current, placing a receptacle over the anode and one over the cathode, and you reverse the process, for in the one you will find oxygen and in the other, hydrogen. The water has changed back to its original form. The time required for the change depends only on the dispatch with which the process is applied."

"You have offered analogical proof," said Tane, "but nothing more."

"Permit me to remind you," smiled Nadeem, "that your own scientists have offered nothing more than analogical proof for a biological theory which many of them believe religiously—the theory of evolution. However, time will reveal what is true and what is false. And in the meantime, let me warn you that your life is in grave danger. Here is the gun," handing him the forty-five, "which I took from you last evening. Keep it constantly within reach, and be ever on your guard."

"May I ask," queried Tane, "from whom or from what I am in danger? I have injured no one. Why should anyone wish to kill me?"

"You are Lord of the Lamia. Hence there are those who envy you and will try to supplant you. She will be your greatest protector, and will watch over you. But she is not invulnerable. I, too, shall watch, and do what I can. But you must help yourself. You have a saying: 'The Lord helps those who help themselves.' It will be wise for you to live up to it in this respect. I presume that you will want to get settled in your new home today, so I will not detain you longer. The doctor, I understand, moved out this morning. I will send a man with you to show you the way."

"I do have a devil of a lot to attend to—servants to hire, furnishings to buy, and all that. So, if you will excuse me, I'll be on my way."

Nadeem clapped his hands, and a short, dark-skinned fellah appeared.

"You will conduct Tane Effendi to his home, Mahmud," he ordered.

"Good-bye. Thanks for the hospitality—and the warning," said Tane, as he followed the servant out the door.

"Ma salam," replied Hagg Nadeem, smiling sweetly.

TANE found his servant, Ali, seated on the bench beside the door of his empty house, smoking his chibouk. He dismissed his guide with a coin, and entered, Ali at his heels.

"There have been many people here seeking employment, *sidi,"* said the Syrian, when they reached the reception room. "Also there came merchants with rugs, mattresses, pipes, utensils and other household articles, having heard that you

had moved in without furniture. But I told them all to return later."

Tane sat down wearily on the edge of the cushionless diwan, and lighted a cigarette.

"We'll just camp here for today," he said. "Tomorrow will be time enough to see about servants and begin buying the furniture. Just get a couple of mattresses, a rug apiece, some food, and such utensils and dishes as you will need to prepare and serve it." He rose and handed his servant five pounds. "Lock the door as you go out, so I won't be disturbed by peddlers and job-hunters."

After he had finished his cigarette, Tane decided to have another look at the mysterious niche which had baffled him so completely, and to explore those parts of the house which he had not previously seen. He accordingly went through the now curtainless doorway, into the room where his strange adventures had taken place. Divested of its rugs and furnishings it had a bare and forbidding look, and despite the brightness of the noonday sun, he had, on entering it, an eery feeling of impending danger—of some lurking, sinister presence.

An examination of the niche revealed the same thing he had last seen—the ancient brick wall flush against the panels as before. But from behind that wall there now came, faintly but unmistakably, a charnel odor that was suggestive of the presence of an unembalmed corpse. So disagreeable was this effluvium that he was glad to close the panels again, pausing only to re-examine the points above where the candles had stood. To his surprize, he now found no carbon there, though he distinctly remembered having previously soiled his finger with soot in examining it. But no matter what he had seen in that niche before, his olfactory nerves convinced him that a corpse was now entombed within it.

Passing thence into the hallway once more, he came to the bathroom. Here, everything loose had been removed, and the mirror door of the medicine cabinet stood open, revealing its emptiness. He was about to go on, when a flash of color attracted his eye—a bright bit of something red and gold, which lay on the tile floor. Bending, he picked it up. It was a piece of wood, gilded and lacquered, which had evidently been split off an ancient mummy-case.

After minutely examining it, he dropped it into his pocket. It was undoubtedly part of a mummy-case—perhaps the very case he had viewed the night before.

Returning to the hallway, he walked on toward the kitchen. But suddenly, just as he stepped through the doorway, the thick smothering folds of a burnoose were thrown over his head, two pairs of powerful arms pinioned his, and he was tripped and thrown to the floor.

8. *The Oasis*

TANE struggled fiercely but futilely in the clutches of his captors. They quickly found and removed his gun, and bound his wrists and ankles with ropes that bit painfully into the flesh. The cloak, which was strongly redolent of camel, was kept over his head. And with a knife pricking the flesh over his heart, one of his captors warned him that unless he kept silent he would be instantly slain. He was then rolled up in a rug, lifted to the shoulders of three men, and carried off.

He heard a door open, then guessed by the way he was being tilted, that his unknown captors were taking him down a stairway. He judged from their whispered conversation and the sounds of their footsteps that there were at least six of them. They walked on a level sur-

face for some distance, then tilted him again, this time evidently carrying him up a stairway. Another door opened. A moment later, he was stowed away in what appeared to be a camel litter. A man seated in the litter with him pricked him with a knife and again warned him to be silent. Then he heard the cameleer alternately coaxing and cursing the beast, until it arose with many snorting, grunting protests. The litter gave a lurch, then settled down to a steady, swaying motion as the great beast started off.

At first Tane knew by the sounds about him that they were passing through the bazars, probably along the Sukten Nahhasi toward the Bab al Fotun, for he heard the mueddins calling the Faithful to the *thur,* or noon prayer, from the minarets of the many mosques clustered in this vicinity.

Some time later he heard a traveler inquire if this were the Bab al Hasaniyeh, and a reply in the affirmative, which told him that he had passed out of Cairo and was probably on the Abbasiyeh Road. Where, he wondered, could his mysterious captors be taking him? And why? He had been a fool to allow himself to be caught thus off his guard. Hagg Nadeem had warned him. But who would have thought to find enemies hiding in his house? And how could they have gotten in with Ali guarding the door?

As he pondered these questions, he presently noticed that all road-sounds had ceased, and that the thudding of the camels' feet was muffled, as if with sand. Apparently, they had turned off the highway into the desert.

Tane's bonds, now perspiration-soaked, chafed and stung his wrists almost unbearably. And the stifling heat engendered a keen thirst that added to his torment. But the camel lurched on and on, hour after hour, until Tane's wrists and ankles grew numb and he sank into a half-smothered lethargy—a hideous nightmare of heat and thirst and torture.

Presently, when it seemed that he had reached the limit of his endurance, the endless swaying ceased, and Tane heard the cameleer's guttural *"Ikh! Ikh!"* as he commanded the beast to kneel. The animal lurched downward, grunted, and came to rest.

After Tane had been dragged from the litter and unrolled from the rug, the smothering cloak was removed from his head, and he saw his captors—six lean, dark-skinned, black-bearded Bedouins. One bent and unbound his ankles. Then two others caught him by the elbows, cruelly wrenching his bound wrists, and jerked him to his feet.

He swayed dizzily between the two kidnappers, and looked about him. They had halted at a small oasis, a shallow waterhole and a few palm trees, surrounded by the billowing sands of the Libyan Desert. Over beyond the waterhole a guard, silhouetted by the rays of the setting sun, leaned on a long rifle, watching a half-dozen camels. And near at hand a dozen of his fellows squatted about a campfire, smoking and chatting. Behind them was a large tent, the front wall of which had been raised to admit the evening breeze.

At this instant, the old man emerged from the tent. With a start, Tane recognized him as Shaykh Ibrahim, the darwish, who had conducted the funeral. With chin held high, he chanted the *adan mughareb,* the call to the sunset prayer. Instantly, all the ruffians except the camel guard and the two men who held Tane, rushed to the pool to make their *wuḍḍu* ablutions. These finished, they faced Mecca, while the shaykh led them in prayer.

Prayers over, the old man rose from his rug, and, turning, entered the tent. Tane's two captors dragged him forward,

and into the tent, at the back of which the old darwish was seated on a mattress, smoking the narghile from which he had weaned himself long enough to perform the pious office of *imam*. As the American was hauled up before the shaykh, the swarthy Bedouins crowded in behind him, and seated themselves on either side, along the tent walls. All glared at him with open hostility, and there were muttered imprecations of "Infidel! Christian!" and "Dog of a Frank!" Though his throat was parched and his tongue was so dry it rattled against the roof of his mouth, Tane knew better than to ask for a drink of water. These ruffians meant him no good; hence they would give him nothing either to eat or drink. For if they were to give either and then slay him they would violate their desert code —the law of the salt. He resolved to face it out boldly, asking nothing of them, and if need be, show these hard-bitten cutthroats than an American could die as bravely as any of them.

THE old shaykh passed the flexible stem of his pipe to the man at his right, and squinted up at the tall young man standing before him.

"I have been informed that you are Lord of the Lamia," he said in Arabic. "Is this true?"

"And if I am, what then?" replied Tane, defiantly returning his gaze.

"You have meddled in an affair which does not concern you—have stolen a privilege and seized a power which does not belong to you—a privilege for which my comrades and I have fought and bled and labored. We demand that you renounce this power in our favor."

"Suppose I do not choose to do so."

"The alternative," said the shaykh, slowly, "is death by impalement, a horrible, lingering death which can profit no one. I am sure you will prefer to give us back our Lamia, and leave this place, free and unharmed, with a present of a thousand gold pounds."

"How do I know that you would keep your word?"

"We are pious Muslims, and will all swear to it by the triple oath."

Tane knew full well that no true Muslim would break the triple oath: *"Wallah! Tillah! Billah!"* And he shuddered to think of the form of death reserved for him if he refused this demand, as he observed a man at his left carefully sharpening the end of a long stake. After all, what did this intangible, ephemeral creature called a Lamia mean to him? He was not sure that she was more than a drug-induced dream. And, no matter what she was, it would be a relief to be rid of her.

"Swear the oath," he said.

The shaykh swore first. He was followed by each of the men, even the camel guard, who was temporarily relieved from duty for the purpose, until all had pledged their irrevocable word to set Tane free with a camel and a thousand gold pounds as soon as he should transfer his lordship of the Lamia to the shaykh.

This ceremony completed, the old darwish clapped his hands, and one of the men brought a small taboret, which he set before his leader. On it was a box, which the old man opened, and from which he took two candles and a scroll. He set a candle on either side of the table, and placed the scroll in the center. At the same time one of Tane's captors slashed his bonds, and another placed a rug for him before the taboret.

"Be seated," invited the shaykh.

Tane sat down.

"And now," went on Shaykh Ibrahim, "you will light the two candles and read the upper passage on the scroll, which summons the Lamia. When she appears,

you will read the lower passage, which conveys her from you to me."

He handed Tane a box of matches, and the latter lit the two candles. By their yellow light, he made out two groups of hieroglyphic characters on the scroll.

"Read," commanded the shaykh.

"First bring me a drink of water," Tane requested. "My throat is so dry it is difficult for me to speak."

The water was brought and he drank slowly, meanwhile scanning the first group of hieroglyphics. In ancient Egyptian, they commanded Lamia, Queen of Libya, to appear before him. Of course she wouldn't appear, he thought. What then? What would these desperadoes do? Still, he was committed to this course. There was nothing for it but to go on with the ceremony.

Patiently, the shaykh waited until Tane had drained the last drop of water from the cup. Then he commanded:

"Read."

Slowly, sonorously, Tane read the ancient words. He reached the end and paused expectantly. A hush had come over the entire assemblage. They, too, were waiting expectantly, and somewhat fearfully. For five minutes they waited soundlessly, but nothing happened. Then the old shaykh spoke.

"Dog!" he rasped. "You have betrayed us. You have not read the words correctly. We will give you one more chance. Read, and if the Lamia does not appear, I swear that we will hoist you on the stake."

"I have read them just as they are written here," Tane remonstrated. "However, I may have made some slight mistake in pronunciation. I'll try again."

Once more he pronounced the words of that ancient language. And once more, for some minutes, nothing followed but silence.

"O consort of camels and spawn of a disease!" shrieked the darwish. "Again you have betrayed us. Seize him, men, and place him upon the stake."

But before any of them could move to carry out the order of their leader, a strange thing happened. A tiny slit appeared in the tent wall behind Shaykh Ibrahim. Then a sinuous, glittering something wriggled through and with a swift dart fastened itself on the old man's wrist. For a moment it hung there in plain view of all; then as swiftly as it had come, it shot back through the opening and disappeared from view. The shaykh glanced at the hideous black-and-yellow thing that had clamped on his wrist—horrified unbelief written on his features. Then, as it withdrew, he collapsed soundlessly, his head sagging on the taboret between the two candles.

"The Lamia!" someone cried. "She came, but only to avenge her lord."

"She will slay us all," moaned another.

A third man leaped up and ran shrieking from the tent. As he did so, the canvas wall was suddenly rent from top to bottom. Through the opening stepped the slender, regal figure Tane had seen in his dreams. She was enveloped from head to foot in a shimmering diaphanous veil that was like a phosphorescent mist, surrounding and but slightly dimming her lovely features and seductive curves. It was the first time Tane had seen her so beautiful.

But if the Bedouins were impressed by her loveliness, they did not linger to admire. As one man, they sprang to their feet and ran howling out into the night.

"Follow them, my lord," said the lovely apparition. "See that not one man remains on the oasis."

Though he was loth to tear his eyes from that witching vision, Tane obeyed. Standing before the door of the tent, he watched the Bedouins frantically mount-

ing their camels and riding away, until no one remained. Then he turned and re-entered the tent. To his surprize, he found it deserted, save for the body of the old shaykh, whose grizzled head still rested on the taboret between the two guttering candles. With a muttered exclamation of amazement, he ran to the back of the tent and peered out through the slit in the wall. Behind it there was no one. Nothing but the tall, shadowy palm trees, their fronds rustling gently in the breeze. And beyond them, the rolling desert. From behind a distant dune he thought he heard the roar of a lion. Or was it an airplane motor? Sorely puzzled, he stood there, straining his eyes into the night. But he whirled, suddenly apprehensive, at sound of a human voice behind him.

HAGG NADEEM, wearing his green turban and brown burnoose, was standing in the middle of the tent, leaning on his Malacca stick and smiling his sweet, dreamy smile.

"Salam aleykum, effendi," he said, pleasantly. "You have come quite a way from home."

"Not purposely," Tane replied. "I can assure you of that."

"So I was informed," replied the *hagg*. "Thinking you might not find it comfortable here, I came to take you back. No doubt you are hungry and thirsty. I have brought you food, and a thermos bottle of coffee."

"Allah yukhleff aleyka," Tane thanked him. "Lead me to it."

"One moment, *effendi*. Patience is of Allah the Most High, but haste is of Shaitan the Stoned. First let me have a brief look around."

Swiftly the Egyptian strode over to where the shaykh's head lolled on the taboret. Stooping, he examined the man's wrist by the light of the sputtering candles. Tane, looking over his shoulder, saw two tiny punctures surrounded by a purple discoloration on the bony wrist.

"Waha! Snake-bite!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. It was a big black-and-yellow haje," Tane replied. "We all saw it quite plainly."

"That scum of the bazars I saw riding away must have seen something fearful to send them scurrying so swiftly."

"*She* appeared," Tane told him.

"You mean Lamia?"

"I don't know whom or what I mean."

"Still the careful scientist—the stubborn doubter—after all this! Your people have a saying that we believe only what we wish to believe, and it is evident that you do not wish to credit the evidence of your own eyes. However, in this case, I judge that you were not the only one who saw her."

"The others certainly acted as if they had seen her."

"Hm." Nadeem raised the grizzled head of the shaykh and removed the parchment. "Ah! Interesting. They compelled you to read this, no doubt."

"With a threat of impalement."

"Exactly. And they would have carried out the threat had you not complied. I know these ruffians. But come. There is no profit in lingering here any longer. You will be wanting that coffee and food. It is a long ride back to Cairo, but I have brought a swift, easy-gaited racing-camel with a comfortable litter. Or perhaps," with his dreamy smile, "I should have said that the camel brought me."

9. *Men or Jinn?*

IT WAS well past midnight when Tane and Haag Nadeem, swaying wearily in their camel litter, entered the Bab al Fotun. Some fifteen minutes later the camel knelt before the American's doorway.

"I'll go in with you," said the *hagg*.

"You mean that I am still in danger?"

"Death hangs over your head, suspended on a thread thinner than that which supported the sword of Damocles," replied Nadeem, as Tane unlocked the door. "Shaykh Ibrahim represented only a minor menace. You have yet to deal with the most dangerous of your adversaries."

The American swung the door open, and they entered the courtyard.

"Perhaps I could be better prepared to defend myself if you would tell me who they are," said Tane.

"That is just what I intend doing. But first, let us see if the house is clear of enemies."

Nadeem opened the door of the *mandarah*. All was dark within. Producing a flashlight from beneath his clothing, he projected a thin white beam into the room.

"Mashallah!" he exclaimed. "Well done, *effendi*. You have a most efficient servant. Already, he has furnished the reception room, and with considerable magnificence."

"What's that? Wait until I light the lamp. Why, this is amazing! I only gave him five pounds."

Tane quickly lighted an ornate brass lamp which the beam of Nadeem's flashlight had revealed hanging from the ceiling. Its mellow amber glow revealed the room completely furnished with a magnificence that would have done credit to a sultan's palace. And the air was fragrant with the odors of musk and sandalwood.

"Did you say five pounds?" queried the *hagg*. "If so, your man must be a wizard."

Tane stared at the rich tapestries and rare rugs that graced the walls, the brocaded door-curtains in which were woven golden threads, the thick, deep-piled rug on which they were standing, the diwans with their bright new mattresses and silken cushions, and the various taborets and articles of furniture which, collectively, must have cost a sizable fortune. To his astonishment he also saw that the wall which had been built in the alcove was torn out, and all traces of its presence obliterated. The diwans were restored as before, and a brazier of incense was smoldering in the niche.

"Look, *hagg*," he exclaimed. "The coffin has been taken away."

"So it seems," agreed Nadeem.

"And these furnishings! Good Lord! Ali was always a sharp bargainer, but he must have mesmerized some merchant to get all this with the money he had with him."

Hagg Nadeem, meanwhile, parted the brocaded curtains that led to the hallway, and once more turning on his flashlight, shone it through the door of the next room.

"By my head and beard! The man is doubly a wizard!" he cried. "For this room is as richly furnished as the other."

Hurrying after him, Tane gazed into the room, speechless with amazement.

"Well, there's only one way to find out," he said, finally. "We'll ask Ali. I suppose he is asleep upstairs."

THEY returned to the reception room, and Nadeem, with his flashlight, led the way up. Here, when Tane stepped into the room above, he once more gasped in amazement. For the *majlis* was furnished with even greater splendor than the rooms below.

"Ali," he called. "Where are you?"

There was no answer.

"Ali!" he shouted, more loudly.

Still no reply.

"Here, what's this?" said Hagg Nadeem. His flashlight revealed the soles of a pair of cordovan slippers projecting from beneath a mattress on one of the

diwans. Stiffly, Tane lighted the central hanging lamp, a priceless object of antique art, and hurried to the diwan. With the handle of his Malacca stick, Nadeem hooked the mattress and jerked it off the diwan. Beneath it lay Ali, shivering with fright, his head buried beneath his arms as if he would fend off a blow. Swiftly, he muttered the Takbir, the Testification of Faith, and the Fatihah, one after another.

"Ali! What the devil's got into you?" demanded Tane.

"O iron, thou unlucky!" moaned Ali, burying his head still deeper.

"The fool thinks we are *jinn,*" said Nadeem. "Iron is the talisman against the hosts of Jan ibn Jan, sultan of evil *jinn.* Something has frightened him half out of his wits."

"*Clear* out of them, I should say," said Tane. "Here, Ali," seizing his arm. "Look at me."

"Spare me, O brave and handsome emir of the *jinn,*" moaned Ali. "Spare the basest of your slaves."

Impatiently, Tane clutched his arm and jerked him erect. The Syrian looked at him as if scarcely crediting the evidence of his senses.

"Don't you know me, idiot?" snapped his master. "What kind of dope have you been taking?"

For a moment Ali stared fearfully at him. Then he said:

"Have they gone, *sidi?* Is it really you, or are you a *jinni* who has taken the form of my master?"

"Hagg Nadeem and I just came in," said Tane. "We saw no *jinn,* nor anyone else. Tell us what happened. And where did you get all these gorgeous furnishings?"

"*She* brought them, *sidi.*"

"Who is 'She'?"

"The *jinniyah.* More beautiful was she than a houri from the Gardens of the Blessed; slender and graceful as a willow wand, with raven tresses, languorous dark eyes, a brow of alabaster, cheeks like newly ripened peaches, lips red as crushed pomegranates, teeth that were matched pearls——"

"Hold on. How was she dressed?"

"She wore a crown of gold with two nodding white plumes, fronted by a golden, jewel-eyed serpent. And a filmy veil enveloped her. She was accompanied by a host of *afreets, marids* and *peris,* who did her bidding."

"What are you talking about? How were these elementals dressed?"

"Like the ancient demons and *ghuls* whose pictures are on the walls of tombs."

"Apparently he means the soldiers, workmen, slaves and others depicted in the tomb paintings," said Nadeem. "This is most remarkable!"

"It is unbelievable," said Tane. "When did it happen, Ali?"

"I had bought the mattresses and supplies in accordance with your instructions, *sidi,*" said Ali, "and on finding you absent when I returned from the *souk,* concluded that you had gone out on some private business. I prepared dinner, and awaited your coming until quite late. But when, long after sunset, you did not appear, I ate the cold food, made *wuddu,* and prayed the prayer *al aisha.* I then placed a mattress in the reception room and sat down beside a lighted candle to smoke my chibouk. Suddenly I heard the sound of footsteps in the hallway. I arose, and was about to investigate, when the sultana of the *jinn* entered the room. Behind her trooped a horde of *afreets* and *marids,* bearing boxes and bales on their backs. And with her were two great black *shaitans* with swords in their hands and horns on their heads."

"That would be about two hours after sunset," said Nadeem.

"Precisely. About an hour after I saw Lamia on the oasis. Yet it took us five hours to ride back on a swift racing-camel. It seems that there are two of her."

"Perhaps she has a magic carpet," suggested Nadeem, facetiously.

"Go on, Ali," said Tane.

"The *jinniyah* pointed to me," continued the Syrian, "and said to the two black *shaitans:* 'Seize him, and see that he does not escape.' Whereupon they rushed at me, brandishing their simitars, and dragged me to my feet.

" 'Throw these filthy vermin-nests into the street,' she ordered one of the *marids,* and pointed to the mattresses I had bought. Then she set about giving orders to the others, to tear out the new wall, carry out the coffin, install a rug here, a taboret there, a tapestry here, and a curtain there, and to hang a lamp so, until the place looked like the *salamlik* of a palace. Then she moved from room to room, doing likewise in each, until the house was completely furnished.

"When all was finished, her slaves melted away, one by one, until there remained but the two black *shaitans*. Then she, too, disappeared, and one of those ebon sons of Ibless hurled me to a diwan in the *majlis*. 'Wait here until I come for you,' he commanded. 'Try to leave, and you will be cut into cat-meat.' He put out the lamp, and I waited here in the darkness, afraid to leave and afraid to remain. Presently, hearing your voices and footsteps, I thought the two *shaitans* had returned for me, and certain that my end had come, hid beneath the mattress."

"Did I not know you for a man of veracity, I should call you a colossal liar," said Tane, "even though you have plenty of evidence. But since the house has been emptied of demons, see if you can find some coffee, sugar and charcoal in the kitchen, and if so, prepare us some *ahhwi helwh.*"

"Harkening and obedience, *sidi,*" said Ali, and withdrew.

"WHAT do you make of it?" Tane asked, turning to Nadeem.

"Most remarkable," smiled the *hagg.* "The lady seems to be looking out for your material interests, as well as defending your life."

"But where could she have gotten all this plunder?"

"You might ask her," suggested Nadeem.

"I still can't believe it all. It seems like a dream. I might, in time, have come to believe in such creatures as Lamia is supposed to be, but I can hardly credit her with bringing a host of her subjects with her through the ages, to raid the palace of some wealthy pasha and bring me the loot. That's just a bit *too* thick."

"Ah, well," said Hagg Nadeem, proffering his cigarette case, "it may be that this mystery, like the other, will eventually unravel itself."

At this instant, Ali entered with the coffee. For some time they sipped and smoked in silence. Then Nadeem rose.

"I must go, now," he said. "I presume you will want a bowab and a cook. Tomorrow, I will send you two men whom I can recommend. The bowab is a powerful and trustworthy Nubian who will make an excellent guard. The cook is a Touareg, who adheres to the blue veil of his people. But his culinary skill is most remarkable."

"One moment," said Tane, rising. "You forgot to tell me the names of the two powerful enemies I am to look out for."

"So I did. The first is Maksoud, the hawk-nosed Persian you found reading the scroll. The other is Doctor Schneider."

"Doctor Schneider! Why, I can't believe——"

"Hadrak," interrupted the *hagg* with his pleasant smile. "And remember, it will be to your interest to believe."

With a polite bow, he disappeared through the curtains.

"See the *hagg* to the street door, Ali," ordered Tane. "And don't forget to bolt it."

It was not until Hagg Nadeem had gone, and Ali had returned, that Tane suddenly remembered the loss of his forty-five. Also, he recalled that he had forgotten to ask the *hagg* the location of the secret passageway, with which his enemies were obviously familiar. Locking the door, after all, had been but a futile gesture.

"Looks as if we're up against it, Ali," he said, as his servant entered the *majlis.* "Those cutthroats can walk in on us any time they please, and my gun is gone."

"The *jinn* hung two gold-hilted yatagans above the niche in the reception room, *sidi,"* said Ali.

"Then bring them. They'll be better than nothing."

The Syrian hurried downstairs, and returned with the two double-curved swords.

Tane took one, and removed it from its plush-covered sheath. It proved to be of excellent steel and splendid workmanship, with an edge of almost razor sharpness.

"Well! We're not so badly off for weapons, after all," he said. "I'm going to turn in, now, and you'd better do the same. Sleep here in the *majlis,* and if you hear the slightest sound, awaken me."

Tane parted the heavy gold-embroidered hangings and went into his room. He found his diwan furnished with a mattress, coverlets and silken cushions that might have graced the bed of an opulent emir. Not bothering to light a lamp, he dropped the hangings, and undressed in the moonlight. He was dead-tired, and that magnificently furnished couch was most inviting. As he tumbled in among the cushions Ali blew out the lamp in the *majlis.*

Placing the yatagan under the cover beside him, Tane settled down and tried to sleep. But it seemed that sleep was impossible. Presently, however, he heard the regular breathing of the Syrian in the next room, and shortly thereafter slipped into unconsciousness.

Tane's awakening was both sudden and unpleasant. There was something encircling his throat—something that bit painfully into the flesh and shut off his breath so quickly that his palate rattled. He had been lying on his side with his face toward the window, and instinctively tried to sit up. But he was immediately jerked back. Then two sets of knuckles pressed into his cervical vertebræ and the cord about his throat tightened relentlessly. He struggled spasmodically. The moonlit room seemed whirling about him, then turned to a maelstrom of black nothingness which he knew was the precursor of death.

The fascinating, thrilling chapters that bring this remarkable story to a conclusion will appear in next month's WEIRD TALES. Reserve your copy at your news dealer's now.

Dream-Stair

By ROBERT NELSON

What naked, bald and drunken child
Leads me to some mad, topless stair
And keeps me toiling upward there,
A withered thing, forlorn and wild?
About me swarm Satanic goats,
The seas below are frothing red,
And harsh winds sting my seething head
As steel on stone drops down in moats
Where drown and rot accursèd swains—
Dismembered thralls of some mad king—
Whose bloating heads arise and sing.
But, lo! whence all these hellish rains
That seem to linger for an age
And pour upon my harried life
Such airs, with loathsome larvæ rife,
As whisper o'er a wizard's page?
Then, mounting with white moons, I see
The frenzied flight of huge man-birds,
And hear the cold and lethal words
Babbled behind that drapery
Whose swelling folds lean forth and sway,
Shrouding a handed Shape, that grasps
And throttles all the Gorgon's asps,
And braves the Gorgon's eyes to slay!
The child brings ardent wine to me,
And still I climb the dream-built stair;
And in fell silence spreading there
Great shadows eat the spherèd sea.
False child! false child! O traitor child!
What Image meets my frozen eyes?
Is It what Satan sanctifies—
Full-fraught with bale but pleasing mild?
But the stair crumbles, clean destroyed,
The circling mists and phantoms flee,
The child pursues them mad with glee,
And leaves me in the falling void.

The Last Hieroglyph

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A tale of inexorable destiny, and the grim figure of a mummy that strode through the Houses of the astrologer's horoscope

The world itself, in the end, shall be turned to a round cipher.—Old prophecy of Zothique.

NUSHAIN the astrologer had studied the circling orbs of night from many far-separated regions, and had cast, with such skill as he was able to command, the horoscopes of a myriad men, women and children. From city to city, from realm to realm he had gone, abiding briefly in any place: for often the local magistrates had banished him as a common charlatan; or elsewise, in due time, his consultants had discovered the error of his predictions and had fallen away from him. Sometimes he went hungry and shabby; and small honor was paid to him anywhere. The sole companions of his precarious fortunes were a wretched mongrel dog that had somehow attached itself to him in the desert town of Zul-Bha-Sair, and a mute, one-eyed negro whom he had bought very cheaply in Yoros. He had named the dog Ansarath, after the canine star, and had called the negro Mouzda, which was a word signifying darkness.

In the course of his prolonged itinerations, the astrologer came to Xylac and made his abode in its capital, Ummaos, which had been built above the shards of an elder city of the same name, long since destroyed by a sorcerer's wrath. Here Nushain lodged with Ansarath and Mouzda in a half-ruinous attic of a rotting tenement; and from the tenement's roof, Nushain was wont to observe the positions and movements of the sidereal bodies on evenings not obscured by the fumes of the city. At intervals some housewife or jade, some porter or huckster or petty merchant, would climb the decaying stairs to his chamber, and would pay him a small sum for the nativity which he plotted with immense care by the aid of his tattered books of astrological science.

When, as often occurred, he found himself still at a loss regarding the significance of some heavenly conjunction or opposition after poring over his books, he would consult Ansarath, and would draw profound auguries from the variable motions of the dog's mangy tail or his actions in searching for fleas. Certain of these divinations were fulfilled, to the considerable benefit of Nushain's renown in Ummaos. People came to him more freely and frequently, hearing that he was a soothsayer of some note; and, moreover, he was immune from prosecution, owing to the liberal laws of Xylac, which permitted all the sorcerous and mantic arts.

It seemed, for the first time, that the dark planets of his fate were yielding to auspicious stars. For this fortune, and the coins which accrued thereby to his purse, he gave thanks to Vergama who, throughout the whole continent of Zothique, was deemed the most powerful and mysterious of the genii, and was thought to rule over the heavens as well as the earth.

ON A summer night, when the stars were strewn thickly like a fiery sand on the black azure vault, Nushain went up to the roof of his lodging-place. As

"White spiders, demon-headed and large as monkeys, had woven their webs in the hollow arches of the bones."

was often his custom, he took with him the negro Mouzda, whose one eye possessed a miraculous sharpness and had served well, on many occasions, to supplement the astrologer's own rather near-sighted vision. Through a well-codified system of signs and gestures, the mute was able to communicate the result of his observations to Nushain.

On this night the constellation of the Great Dog, which had presided over Nushain's birth, was ascendant in the east. Regarding it closely, the dim eyes of the astrologer were troubled by a sense of something unfamiliar in its configuration. He could not determine the precise character of the change till Mouzda, who evinced much excitement, called

his attention to three new stars of the second magnitude which had appeared in close proximity to the Dog's hindquarters. These remarkable novæ, which Nushain could discern only as three reddish blurs, formed a small equilateral triangle. Nushain and Mouzda were both certain that they had not been visible on any previous evening.

"By Vergama, this is a strange thing," swore the astrologer, filled with amazement and dumfoundment. He began to compute the problematic influence of the novæ on his future reading of the heavens, and perceived at once that they would exert, according to the law of astral emanations, a modifying effect on his own destiny, which had been so largely controlled by the Dog.

He could not, however, without consulting his books and tables, decide the particular trend and import of this supervening influence; though he felt sure that it was most momentous, whether for his bale or welfare. Leaving Mouzda to watch the heavens for other prodigies, he descended at once to his attic. There, after collating the opinions of several old-time astrologers on the power exerted by novæ, he began to re-cast his own horoscope. Painfully and with much agitation he labored throughout the night, and did not finish his figurings till the dawn came to mix a deathly grayness with the yellow light of the candles.

There was, it seemed, but one possible interpretation of the altered heavens. The appearance of the triangle of novæ in conjunction with the Dog signified clearly that Nushain was to start ere long on an unpremeditated journey which would involve the transit of no less than three elements. Mouzda and Ansarath were to accompany him; and three guides, appearing successively, at the proper times, would lead him toward a destined goal. So much his calculations had revealed, but no more: there was nothing to foretell whether the journey would prove auspicious or disastrous, nothing to indicate its bourn, purpose or direction.

The astrologer was much disturbed by this somewhat singular and equivocal augury. He was ill pleased by the prospect of an imminent journey, for he did not wish to leave Ummaos, among whose credulous people he had begun to establish himself not without success. Moreover, a strong apprehension was roused within him by the oddly manifold nature and veiled outcome of the journey. All this, he felt, was suggestive of the workings of some occult and perhaps sinister providence; and surely it was no common traveling which would take him through three elements and would require a triple guidance.

During the nights that followed, he and Mouzda watched the mysterious novæ as they went over toward the west behind the bright-flaming Dog. And he puzzled interminably over his charts and volumes, hoping to discover some error in the reading he had made. But always, in the end, he was compelled to the same interpretation.

More and more, as time went on, he was troubled by the thought of that unwelcome and mysterious journey which he must make. He continued to prosper in Ummaos, and it seemed that there was no conceivable reason for his departure from that city. He was as one who awaited a dark and secret summons, not knowing whence it would come, nor at what hour. Throughout the days, he scanned with fearful anxiety the faces of his visitors, deeming that the first of the three star-predicted guides might arrive unheralded and unrecognized among them.

Mouzda and the dog Ansarath, with the intuition of dumb things, were sensible of the weird uneasiness felt by their master. They shared it palpably, the ne-

gro showing his apprehension by wild and demoniac grimaces, and the dog crouching under the astrologer's table or prowling restlessly to and fro with his half-hairless tail between his legs. Such behavior, in its turn, served to reconfirm the inquietude of Nushain, who deemed it a bad omen.

On a certain evening, Nushain pored for the fiftieth time over his horoscope, which he had drawn with sundry-colored inks on a sheet of papyrus. He was much startled when, on the blank lower margin of the sheet, he saw a curious character which was no part of his own scribbling. The character was a hieroglyph written in dark bituminous brown, and seeming to represent a mummy whose shroudings were loosened about the legs and whose feet were set in the posture of a long stride. It was facing toward that quarter of the chart where stood the sign indicating the Great Dog, which, in Zothique, was a House of the zodiac.

Nushain's surprize turned to a sort of trepidation as he studied the hieroglyph. He knew that the margin of the chart had been wholly clear on the previous night; and during the past day he had not left the attic at any time. Mouzda, he felt sure, would never have dared to touch the chart; and, moreover, the negro was little skilled in writing. Among the various inks employed by Nushain, there was none that resembled the sullen brown of the character, which seemed to stand out in a sad relief on the white papyrus.

Nushain felt the alarm of one who confronts a sinister and unexplainable apparition. No human hand, surely, had inscribed the mummy-shapen character, like the sign of a strange outer planet about to invade the Houses of his horoscope. Here, as in the advent of the three novæ, an occult agency was suggested. Vainly, for many hours, he sought to unriddle the mystery: but in all his books there was naught to enlighten him; for this thing, it seemed, was wholly without precedent in astrology.

During the next day he was busied from morn till eve with the plotting of those destinies ordained by the heavens for certain people of Ummaos. After completing the calculations with his usual toilsome care, he unrolled his own chart once more, albeit with trembling fingers. An eeriness that was nigh to panic seized him when he saw that the brown hieroglyph no longer stood on the margin, but was now placed like a striding finger in one of the lower Houses, where it still fronted toward the Dog, as if advancing on that ascendant sign.

Henceforth the astrologer was fevered with the awe and curiosity of one who watches a fatal but inscrutable portent. Never, during the hours that he pondered above it, was there any change in the intruding character; and yet, on each successive evening when he took out the chart, he saw that the mummy had strode upward into a higher House, drawing always nearer to the House of the Dog. . . .

There came a time when the figure stood on the Dog's threshold. Portentous with mystery and menace that were still beyond the astrologer's divining, it seemed to wait while the night wore on and was shot through with the gray wefting of dawn. Then, overworn with his prolonged studies and vigils, Nushain slept in his chair. Without the troubling of any dream he slept; and Mouzda was careful not to disturb him; and no visitors came to the attic on that day. So the morn and the noon and the afternoon went over, and their going was unheeded by Nushain.

He was awakened at eve by the loud and dolorous howling of Ansarath, which appeared to issue from the room's far-

thest corner. Confusedly, ere he opened his eyes, he became aware of an odor of bitter spices and piercing natron. Then, with the dim webs of sleep not wholly swept from his vision, he beheld, by the yellowy tapers that Mouzda had lighted, a tall, mummy-like form that waited in silence beside him. The head, arms and body of the shape were wound closely with bitumen-colored cerements; but the folds were loosened from the hips downward, and the figure stood like a walker, with one brown, withered foot in advance of its fellow.

Terror quickened in Nushain's heart, and it came to him that the shrouded shape, whether lich or phantom, resembled the weird, invasive hieroglyph that had passed from House to House through the chart of his destiny. Then, from the thick swathings of the apparition, a voice issued indistinctly, saying: "Prepare yourself, O Nushain, for I am the first guide of that journey which was foretold to you by the stars."

Ansarath, cowering beneath the astrologer's bed, was still howling his fear of the visitant; and Nushain saw that Mouzda had tried to conceal himself in company with the dog. Though a chill as of imminent death was upon him, and he deemed the apparition to be death itself, Nushain arose from his chair with that dignity proper to an astrologer, which he had maintained through all the vicissitudes of his lifetime. He called Mouzda and Ansarath from their hiding-place, and the two obeyed him, though with many cringings before the dark, muffled mummy.

With the comrades of his fortune behind him, Nushain turned to the visitant. "I am ready," he said, in a voice whose quavering was almost imperceptible. "But I would take with me certain of my belongings."

The mummy shook his mobled head. "It were well to take with you nothing but your horoscope: for this alone shall you retain in the end."

Nushain stooped above the table on which he had left his nativity. Before he began to roll the open papyrus, he noticed that the hieroglyph of the mummy had vanished. It was as if the written symbol, after moving athwart his horoscope, had materialized itself in the figure that now attended him. But on the chart's nether margin, in remote opposition to the Dog, was the sea-blue hieroglyph of a quaint merman with carp-like tail and head half human, half apish; and behind the merman was the black hieroglyph of a small barge.

Nushain's fear, for a moment, was subdued by wonder. But he rolled the chart carefully, and stood holding it in his right hand.

"Come," said the guide. "Your time is brief, and you must pass through the three elements that guard the dwelling-place of Vergama from unseasonable intrusion."

These words, in a measure, confirmed the astrologer's divinations. But the mystery of his future fate was in no wise lightened by the intimation that he must enter, presumably at the journey's end, the dim House of that being called Vergama, whom some considered the most secret of all the gods, and others, the most cryptical of demons. In all the lands of Zothique, there were rumors and fables regarding Vergama; but these were wholly diverse and contradictory, except in their common attribution of almost omnipotent powers to this entity. No man knew the situation of his abode; but it was believed that vast multitudes of people had entered it during the centuries and millenniums, and that none had returned therefrom.

Ofttimes had Nushain called upon the name of Vergama, swearing or protesting

thereby as men are wont to do by the cognomens of their shrouded lords. But now, hearing the name from the lips of his macabre visitor, he was filled with the darkest and most eery apprehensions. He sought to subdue these feelings, and to resign himself to the manifest will of the stars. With Mouzda and Ansarath at his heels, he followed the striding mummy, which seemed little hampered, if at all, by its trailing cerements.

With one regretful backward glance at his littered books and papers, he passed from the attic room and down the tenement stairs. A wannish light seemed to cling about the swathings of the mummy; but, apart from this, there was no illumination; and Nushain thought that the house was strangely dark and silent, as if all its occupants had died or had gone away. He heard no sound from the evening city; nor could he see aught but close-encroaching darkness beyond the windows that should have gazed on a little street. Also, it seemed that the stairs had changed and lengthened, giving no more on the courtyard of the tenement, but plunging deviously into an unsuspected region of stifling vaults and foul, dismal, nitrous corridors.

Here the air was pregnant with death, and the heart of Nushain failed him. Everywhere, in the shadow-curtained crypts and deep-shelved recesses, he felt the innumerable presence of the dead. He thought that there was a sad sighing of stirred cerements, a breath exhaled by long-stiffened cadavers, a dry clicking of lipless teeth beside him as he went. But darkness walled his vision, and he saw nothing save the luminous form of his guide, who stalked onward as if through a natal realm.

It seemed to Nushain that he passed through boundless catacombs in which were housed the mortality and corruption of all the ages. Behind him still he heard the shuffling of Mouzda, and at whiles the low, frightened whine of Ansarath; so he knew that the twain were faithful to him. But upon him, with a chill of lethal damps, there grew the horror of his surroundings; and he shrank with all the repulsion of living flesh from the shrouded thing that he followed, and those other things that moldered round about in the fathomless gloom.

HALF thinking to hearten himself by the sound of his own voice, he began to question the guide; though his tongue clove to his mouth as if palsied. "Is it indeed Vergama, and none other, who has summoned me forth upon this journey? For what purpose has he called me? And in what land is his dwelling?"

"Your fate has summoned you," said the mummy. "In the end, at the time appointed and no sooner, you shall learn the purpose. As to your third question, you would be no wiser if I should name the region in which the house of Vergama is hidden from mortal trespass: for the land is not listed on any terrene chart, nor map of the starry heavens."

These answers seemed equivocal and disquieting to Nushain, who was possessed by frightful forebodings as he went deeper into the subterranean charnels. Dark, indeed, he thought, must be the goal of a journey whose first stage had led him so far amid the empire of death and corruption; and dubious, surely, was the being who had called him forth and had sent to him as the first guide a sere and shrunken mummy clad in the tomb's habiliments.

Now, as he pondered these matters almost to frenzy, the shelfy walls of the catacomb before him were outlined by a dismal light, and he came after the mummy into a chamber where tall candles of black pitch in sockets of tarnished silver

burned about an immense and solitary sarcophagus. Upon the blank lid and sides of the sarcophagus, as Nushain neared it, he could see neither runes nor sculptures nor hieroglyphs engraven; but it seemed, from the proportions, that a giant must lie within.

The mummy passed athwart the chamber without pausing. But Nushain, seeing that the vaults beyond were full of darkness, drew back with a reluctance that he could not conquer; and though the stars had decreed his journey, it seemed to him that human flesh could go no farther. Prompted by a sudden impulse, he seized one of the heavy yard-long tapers that burned stilly about the sarcophagus; and, holding it in his left hand, with his horoscope still firmly clutched in the right, he fled with Mouzda and Ansarath on the way he had come, hoping to retrace his footsteps through the gloomy caverns and return to Ummaos by the taper's light.

He heard no sound of pursuit from the mummy. But ever, as he fled, the pitch candle, flaring wildly, revealed to him the horrors that darkness had curtained from his eyes. He saw the bones of men that were piled in repugnant confusion with those of fell monsters, and the riven sarcophagi from which protruded the half-decayed members of innominate beings; members which were neither heads nor hands nor feet. And soon the catacomb divided and redivided before him, so that he must choose his way at random, not knowing whether it would lead him back to Ummaos or into the untrod depths.

Presently he came to the huge, browless skull of an uncouth creature, which reposed on the ground with upward-gazing orbits; and beyond the skull was the monster's moldy skeleton, wholly blocking the passage. Its ribs were cramped by the narrowing walls, as if it had crept there and had died in the darkness, unable to withdraw or go forward. White spiders, demon-headed and large as monkeys, had woven their webs in the hollow arches of the bones; and they swarmed out interminably as Nushain approached; and the skeleton seemed to stir and quiver as they seethed over it abhorrently and dropped to the ground before the astrologer. Behind them others poured in a countless army, crowding and mantling every ossicle. Nushain fled with his companions; and running back to the forking of the caverns, he followed another passage.

Here he was not pursued by the demon spiders. But, hurrying on lest they or the mummy overtake him, he was soon halted by the rim of a great pit which filled the catacomb from wall to wall and was overwide for the leaping of man. The dog Ansarath, sniffing certain odors that arose from the pit, recoiled with a mad howling; and Nushain, holding the taper outstretched above it, discerned far down a glimmer of ripples spreading circlewise on some unctuous black fluid; and two blood-red spots appeared to swim with a weaving motion at the center. Then he heard a hissing as of some great cauldron heated by wizard fires; and it seemed that the blackness boiled upward, mounting swiftly and evilly to overflow the pit; and the red spots, as they neared him, were like luminous eyes that gazed malignantly into his own. . . .

So Nushain turned away in haste; and, returning upon his steps, he found the mummy awaiting him at the junction of the catacombs.

"It would seem, O Nushain, that you have doubted your own horoscope," said the guide, with a certain irony. "However, even a bad astrologer, on occasion, may read the heavens aright. Obey, then, the stars that decreed your journey."

Henceforward, Nushain followed the

mummy without recalcitrance. Returning to the chamber in which stood the immense sarcophagus, he was enjoined by his guide to replace in its socket the black taper he had stolen. Without other light than the phosphorescence of the mummy's cerements, he threaded the foul gloom of those profounder ossuaries which lay beyond. At last, through caverns where a dull dawning intruded upon the shadows, he came out beneath shrouded heavens, on the shore of a wild sea that clamored in mist and cloud and spindrift. As if recoiling from the harsh air and light, the mummy drew back into the subterrane, and it said:

"Here my dominion ends, and I must leave you to await the second guide."

STANDING with the poignant sea-salt in his nostrils, with his hair and garments outblown on the gale, Nushain heard a metallic clangor, and saw that a door of rusty bronze had closed in the cavern-entrance. The beach was walled by unscalable cliffs that ran sheerly to the wave on each hand. So perforce the astrologer waited; and from the torn surf he beheld erelong the emergence of a sea-blue merman whose head was half human, half apish; and behind the merman there hove a small black barge that was not steered or rowed by any visible being. At this, Nushain recalled the hieroglyphs of the sea-creature and the boat which had appeared on the margin of his nativity; and unrolling the papyrus, he saw with wonderment that the figures were both gone; and he doubted not that they had passed, like the mummy's hieroglyph, through all the zodiacal Houses, even to that House which presided over his destiny; and thence, mayhap, they had emerged into material being. But in their stead now was the burning hieroglyph of a fire-colored salamander, set opposite to the Great Dog.

The merman beckoned to him with antic gestures, grinning deeply, and showing the white serrations of his shark-like teeth. Nushain went forward and entered the barge in obedience to the signs made by the sea-creature; and Mouzda and Ansarath, in faithfulness to their master, accompanied him. Thereupon the merman swam away through the boiling surf; and the barge, as if oared and ruddered by mere enchantment, swung about forthwith, and warring smoothly against wind and wave, was drawn straightly over that dim, unnamable ocean.

Half seen amid rushing foam and mist, the merman swam steadily on before. Time and space were surely outpassed during that voyage; and as if he had gone beyond mortal existence, Nushain experienced neither thirst nor hunger. But it seemed that his soul drifted upon seas of strange doubt and direst alienation; and he feared the misty chaos about him even as he had feared the nighted catacombs. Often he tried to question the mer-creature concerning their destination, but received no answer. And the wind blowing from shores unguessed, and the tide flowing to unknown gulfs, were alike filled with whispers of awe and terror.

Nushain pondered the mysteries of his journey almost to madness; and the thought came to him that, after passing through the region of death, he was now traversing the gray limbo of uncreated things; and, thinking this, he was loth to surmise the third stage of his journey; and he dared not reflect upon the nature of its goal.

Anon, suddenly, the mists were riven, and a cataract of golden rays poured down from a high-seated sun. Near at hand, to the lee of the driving barge, a tall island hove with verdurous trees and light, shell-shaped domes, and blossomy gardens hanging far up in the dazzlement of noon. There, with a sleepy purl-

ing, the surf was lulled on a low, grassy shore that had not known the anger of storm; and fruited vines and full-blown flowers were pendent above the water. It seemed that a spell of oblivion and slumber was shed from the island, and that any who landed thereon would dwell inviolable for ever in sun-bright dreams. Nushain was seized with a longing for its green, bowery refuge; and he wished to voyage no farther into the dreadful nothingness of the mist-bound ocean. And between his longing and his terror, he quite forgot the terms of that destiny which had been ordained for him by the stars.

There was no halting nor swerving of the barge; but it drew still nearer to the isle in its coasting; and Nushain saw that the intervening water was clear and shallow, so that a tall man might easily wade to the beach. He sprang into the sea, holding his horoscope aloft, and began to walk toward the island; and Mouzda and Ansarath followed him, swimming side by side.

Though hampered somewhat by his long wet robes, the astrologer thought to reach that alluring shore; nor was there any movement on the part of the merman to intercept him. The water was midway between his waist and his armpits; and now it lapped at his girdle; and now at the knee-folds of his garment; and the island vines and blossoms drooped fragrantly above him.

Then, being but a step from that enchanted beach, he heard a great hissing, and saw that the vines, the boughs, the flowers, the very grasses, were intertwined and mingled with a million serpents, writhing endlessly to and fro in hideous agitation. From all parts of that lofty island the hissing came, and the serpents, with foully mottled volumes, coiled, crept and slithered upon it everywhere; and no single yard of its surface was free from their defilement, or clear for human treading.

Turning seaward in his revulsion, Nushain found the merman and the barge waiting close at hand. Hopelessly he reentered the barge with his followers, and the magically driven boat resumed its course. And now, for the first time, the merman spoke, saying over his shoulder in a harsh, half-articulate voice, not without irony: "It would seem, O Nushain, that you lack faith in your own divinations. However, even the poorest of astrologers may sometimes cast a horoscope correctly. Cease, then, to rebel against that which the stars have written."

THE barge drove on, and the mists closed heavily about it, and the noon-bright island was lost to view. After a vague interim the muffled sun went down behind inchoate waters and clouds; and a darkness as of primal night lay everywhere. Presently, through the torn rack, Nushain beheld a strange heaven whose signs and planets he could not recognize; and at this there came upon him the black horror of utmost dereliction. Then the mists and clouds returned, veiling that unknown sky from his scrutiny. And he could discern nothing but the merman, who was visible by a wan phosphor that clung always about him in his swimming.

Still the barge drove on; and in time it seemed that a red morning rose stifled and conflagrant behind the mists. The boat entered the broadening light, and Nushain, who had thought to behold the sun once more, was dazzled by a strange shore where flames towered in a high unbroken wall, feeding perpetually, to all appearance, on bare sand and rock. With a mighty leaping and a roar as of blown surf the flames went up, and a heat like that of many furnaces smote far on the sea. Swiftly the barge neared the shore;

and the merman, with uncouth gestures of farewell, dived and disappeared under the waters.

Nushain could scarcely regard the flames or endure their heat. But the barge touched the strait tongue of land lying between them and the sea; and before Nushain, from the wall of fire, a blazing salamander emerged, having the form and hue of that hieroglyph which had last appeared on his horoscope. And he knew, with ineffable consternation, that this was the third guide of his threefold journey.

"Come with me," said the salamander, in a voice like the crackling of fagots. Nushain stepped from the barge to that strand which was hot as an oven beneath his feet; and behind him, though with palpable reluctance, Mouzda and Ansarath still followed. But, approaching the flames behind the salamander, and half swooning from their ardor, he was overcome by the weakness of mortal flesh; and seeking again to evade his destiny, he fled along the narrow scroll of beach between the fire and the water. But he had gone only a few paces when the salamander, with a great fiery roaring and racing, intercepted him; and it drove him straight toward the fire with terrible flailings of its dragon-like tail, from which showers of sparks were emitted. He could not face the salamander, and he thought the flames would consume him like paper as he entered them: but in the wall there appeared a sort of opening, and the fires arched themselves into an arcade, and he passed through with his followers, herded by the salamander, into an ashen land where all things were veiled with low-hanging smoke and steam. Here the salamander observed with a kind of irony: "Not wrongly, O Nushain, have you interpreted the stars of your horoscope. And now your journey draws to an end, and you will need no longer the services of a guide." So saying, it left him, going out like a quenched fire on the smoky air.

Nushain, standing irresolute, beheld before him a white stairway that mounted amid the veering vapors. Behind him the flames rose unbroken, like a topless rampart; and on either hand, from instant to instant, the smoke shaped itself into demon forms and faces that menaced him. He began to climb the stairs, and the shapes gathered below and about, frightful as a wizard's familiars, and keeping pace with him as he went upward, so that he dared not pause or retreat. Far up he climbed in the fumy dimness, and came unaware to the open portals of a house of gray stone rearing to unguessed height and amplitude.

UNWILLINGLY, but driven by the thronging of the smoky shapes, he passed through the portals with his companions. The house was a place of long, empty halls, tortuous as the folds of a sea-conch. There were no windows, no lamps; but it seemed that bright suns of silver had been dissolved and diffused in the air. Fleeing from the hellish wraiths that pursued him, the astrologer followed the winding halls and emerged ultimately in an inner chamber where space itself was immured. At the room's center a cowled and muffled figure of colossal proportions sat upright on a marble chair, silent, unstirring. Before the figure, on a sort of table, a vast volume lay open.

Nushain felt the awe of one who approaches the presence of some high demon or deity. Seeing that the phantoms had vanished, he paused on the room's threshold: for its immensity made him giddy, like the void interval that lies between the worlds. He wished to withdraw; but a voice issued from the cowled being, speaking softly as the voice of his own inmost mind:

"I am Vergama, whose other name is Destiny; Vergama, on whom you have called so ignorantly and idly, as men are wont to call on their hidden lords; Vergama, who has summoned you on the journey which all men must make at one time or another, in one way or another way. Come forward, O Nushain, and read a little in my book."

The astrologer was drawn as by an unseen hand to the table. Leaning above it, he saw that the huge volume stood open at its middle pages, which were covered with a myriad signs written in inks of various colors, and representing men, gods, fishes, birds, monsters, animals, constellations, and many other things. At the end of the last column of the right-hand page, where little space was left for other inscriptions, Nushain beheld the hieroglyphs of an equal-sided triangle of stars, such as had lately appeared in proximity to the Dog; and, following these, the hieroglyphs of a mummy, a merman, a barge and a salamander, resembling the figures that had come and gone on his horoscope, and those that had guided him to the house of Vergama.

"In my book," said the cowled figure, "the characters of all things are written and preserved. All visible forms, in the beginning, were but symbols written by me; and at the last they shall exist only as the writing of my book. For a season they issue forth, taking to themselves that which is known as substance. . . . It was I, O Nushain, who set in the heavens the stars that foretold your journey; I, who sent the three guides. And these things, having served their purpose, are now but infoliate ciphers, as before."

Vergama paused, and an infinite silence returned to the room, and a measureless wonder was upon the mind of Nushain. Then the cowled being continued:

"Among men, for a while, there was that person called Nushain the astrologer, together with the dog Ansarath and the negro Mouzda, who followed his fortunes. . . . But now, very shortly, I must turn the page, and before turning it, must finish the writing that belongs thereon."

Nushain thought that a wind arose in the chamber, moving lightly with a weird sigh, though he felt not the actual breath of its passing. But he saw that the fur of Ansarath, cowering close beside him, was ruffled by the wind. Then, beneath his marveling eyes, the dog began to dwindle and wither, as if seared by a lethal magic; and he lessened to the size of a rat, and thence to the smallness of a mouse and the lightness of an insect, though preserving still his original form. After that, the tiny thing was caught up by the sighing air, and it flew past Nushain as a gnat might fly; and, following it, he saw that the hieroglyph of a dog was inscribed suddenly beside that of the salamander, at the bottom of the right-hand page. But, apart from this, there remained no trace of Ansarath.

Again a wind breathed in the room, touching not the astrologer, but fluttering the ragged raiment of Mouzda, who crouched near to his master, as if appealing for protection. And the mute became shrunken and shriveled, turning at the last to a thing light and thin as the black, tattered wing-shard of a beetle, which the air bore aloft. And Nushain saw that the hieroglyph of a one-eyed negro was inscribed following that of the dog; but, aside from this, there was no sign of Mouzda.

Now, perceiving clearly the doom that was designed for him, Nushain would have fled from the presence of Vergama. He turned from the outspread volume and ran toward the chamber door, his worn, tawdry robes of an astrologer flapping about his thin shanks. But

softly in his ear, as he went, there sounded the voice of Vergama:

"Vainly do men seek to resist or evade that destiny which turns them to ciphers in the end. In my book, O Nushain, there is room even for a bad astrologer."

Once more the weird sighing arose, and a cold air played upon Nushain as he ran; and he paused midway in the vast room as if a wall had arrested him. Gently the air breathed on his lean, gaunt figure, and it lifted his graying locks and beard, and it plucked softly at the roll of papyrus which he still held in his hand. To his dim eyes, the room seemed to reel and swell, expanding infinitely. Borne upward, around and around, in a swift vertiginous swirling, he beheld the seated shape as it loomed ever higher above him in cosmic vastness. Then the god was lost in light; and Nushain was a weightless and exile thing, the withered skeleton of a lost leaf, rising and falling on the bright whirlwind.

In the book of Vergama, at the end of the last column of the right-hand page, there stood the hieroglyph of a gaunt astrologer, carrying a furled nativity.

Vergama leaned forward from his chair, and turned the page.

The New World

By RICHARD F. SEARIGHT

I dreamed I hung in ebon, star-flecked space;
And, through a rift in dense-piled banks of cloud
That veil this world like a colossal shroud,
Looked down into the planet's molten face
Where flaming vapors surge and writhe and race.

The clouds are seared by an unending blast
Of cosmic heat from gory seas below;
And painted crimson by the lurid glow
From lambent, gassy streamers swirling past,
To coil and undulate and sink at last.

Beneath the angry spouts of fiery spray
The blood-red cauldron bubbles, deep and slow.
It seethes and moans in an incessant throe
Of genesis, that by its pangs it may
Mold to a fairer life, though hard the way.

Out of the Eons

By HAZEL HEALD

A tale of Elder Magic and a monstrous idol—a shuddery tale of primordial evil

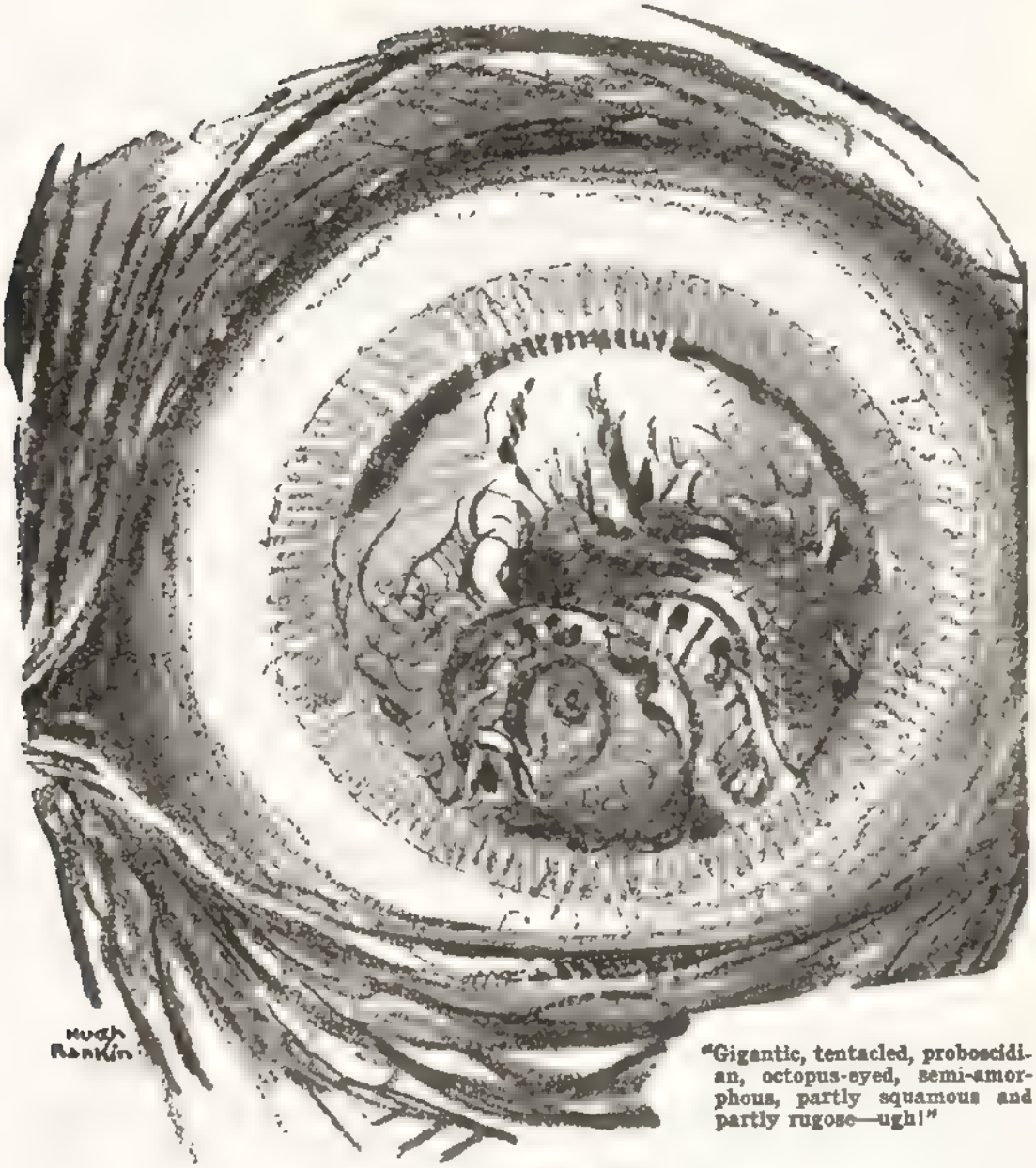
(Mss. found among the effects of the late Richard H. Johnson, Ph. D., curator of the Cabot Museum of Archeology, Boston, Mass.)

IT IS not likely that any one in Boston —or any alert reader elsewhere— will ever forget the strange affair of the Cabot Museum. The newspaper publicity given to that hellish mummy, the antique and terrible rumors vaguely linked with it, the morbid wave of interest and cult activities during 1932, and the frightful fate of the two intruders on December first of that year, all combined to form one of those classic mysteries which go down for generations as folklore and become the nuclei of whole cycles of horrific speculation.

Every one seems to realize, too, that something very vital and unutterably hideous was suppressed in the public accounts of the culminant horrors. Those first disquieting hints as to the *condition* of one of the two bodies were dismissed and ignored too abruptly — nor were the singular *modifications* in the mummy given the following-up which their news value would normally prompt. It also struck people as queer that the mummy was never restored to its case. In these days of expert taxidermy the excuse that its disintegrating condition made exhibition impracticable seemed a peculiarly lame one.

As curator of the museum I am in a position to reveal all the suppressed facts, but this I shall not do during my lifetime. There are things about the world and universe which it is better for the majority not to know, and I have not departed from the opinion in which all of us—museum staff, physicians, reporters, and police—concurred at the period of the horror itself. At the same time it seems proper that a matter of such overwhelming scientific and historic importance should not remain wholly unrecorded—hence this account which I have prepared for the benefit of serious students. I shall place it among various papers to be examined after my death, leaving its fate to the discretion of my executors. Certain threats and unusual events during the past weeks have led me to believe that my life—as well as that of other museum officials—is in some peril through the enmity of several widespread secret cults of Asiatics, Polynesians, and heterogeneous mystical devotees; hence it is possible that the work of the executors may not be long postponed. [Executors' note: Doctor Johnson died suddenly and rather mysteriously of heart failure on April 22, 1933. Wentworth Moore, taxidermist of the museum, disappeared around the middle of the preceding month. On February 18 of the same year Doctor William Minot, who superintended a dissection connected with the case, was stabbed in the back, dying the following day.]

The real beginning of the horror, I suppose, was in 1879—long before my term as curator—when the museum acquired that ghastly, inexplicable mummy from the Orient Shipping Company. Its



"Gigantic, tentacled, proboscidian, octopus-eyed, semi-amorphous, partly squamous and partly rugose—ugh!"

very discovery was monstrous and menacing, for it came from a crypt of unknown origin and fabulous antiquity on a bit of land suddenly upheaved from the Pacific's floor.

On May 11, 1878, Captain Charles Weatherbee of the freighter *Eridanus*, bound from Wellington, New Zealand, to Valparaiso, Chile, had sighted a new island unmarked on any chart and evidently of volcanic origin. It projected quite boldly out of the sea in the form of a truncated cone. A landing-party under Captain Weatherbee noted evidences of long submersion on the rugged slopes which they climbed, while at the summit there were signs of recent destruction, as by an earthquake. Among the scattered rubble were massive stones of manifestly artificial shaping, and a

little examination disclosed the presence of some of that prehistoric cyclopean masonry found on certain Pacific islands and forming a perpetual archeological puzzle.

Finally the sailors entered a massive stone crypt—judged to have been part of a much larger edifice, and to have originally lain far underground—in one corner of which the frightful mummy crouched. After a short period of virtual panic, caused partly by certain carvings on the walls, the men were induced to move the mummy to the ship, though it was only with fear and loathing that they touched it. Close to the body, as if once thrust into its clothes, was a cylinder of an unknown metal containing a roll of thin, bluish-white membrane of equally unknown nature, inscribed with peculiar characters in a grayish, indeterminable pigment. In the center of the vast stone floor was a suggestion of a trap-door, but the party lacked apparatus sufficiently powerful to move it.

The Cabot Museum, then newly established, saw the meager reports of the discovery and at once took steps to acquire the mummy and the cylinder. Curator Pickman made a personal trip to Valparaiso and outfitted a schooner to search for the crypt where the thing had been found, though meeting with failure in this matter. At the recorded position of the island nothing but the sea's unbroken expanse could be discerned, and the seekers realized that the same seismic forces which had suddenly thrust the island up, had carried it down again to the watery darkness where it had brooded for untold eons. The secret of that immovable trap-door would never be solved.

The mummy and the cylinder, however, remained—and the former was placed on exhibition early in November, 1879, in the museum's hall of mummies.

The Cabot Museum of Archeology, which specializes in such remnants of ancient and unknown civilizations as do not fall within the domain of art, is a small and scarcely famous institution, though one of high standing in scientific circles. It stands in the heart of Boston's exclusive Beacon Hill district—in Mt. Vernon Street, near Joy — housed in a former private mansion with an added wing in the rear, and was a source of pride to its austere neighbors until the recent terrible events brought it an undesirable notoriety.

The hall of mummies on the western side of the original mansion (which was designed by Bulfinch and erected in 1819), on the second floor, is justly esteemed by historians and anthropologists as harboring the greatest collection of its kind in America. Here may be found typical examples of Egyptian embalming from the earliest Sakkarah specimens to the last Coptic attempts of the Eighth Century; mummies of other cultures, including the pre-historic Indian specimens recently found in the Aleutian Islands; agonized Pompeian figures molded in plaster from tragic hollows in the ruin-choking ashes; naturally mummified bodies from mines and other excavations in all parts of the earth—some surprized by their terrible entombment in the grotesque postures caused by their last, tearing death-throes — everything, in short, which any collection of the sort could well be expected to contain. In 1879, of course, it was much less ample than it is now; yet even then it was remarkable. But that shocking thing from the primal cyclopean crypt on an ephemeral sea-spawned island was always its chief attraction and most impenetrable mystery.

The mummy was that of a medium-sized man of unknown race, and was cast in a peculiar crouching posture. The face,

half shielded by claw-like hands, had its under jaw thrust far forward, while the shrivelled features bore an expression of fright so hideous that few spectators could view them unmoved. The eyes were closed, with lids clamped down tightly over eyeballs apparently bulging and prominent. Bits of hair and beard remained, and the color of the whole was a sort of dull neutral gray. In texture the thing was half leathery and half stony, forming an insoluble enigma to those experts who sought to ascertain how it was embalmed. In places bits of its substance were eaten away by time and decay. Rags of some peculiar fabric, with suggestions of unknown designs, still clung to the object.

Just what made it so infinitely horrible and repulsive one could hardly say. For one thing, there was a subtle, indefinable sense of limitless antiquity and utter alienage which affected one like a view from the brink of a monstrous abyss of unplumbed blackness—but mostly it was the expression of crazed fear on the puckered, prognathous, half-shielded face. Such a symbol of infinite, inhuman, cosmic fright could not help communicating the emotion to the beholder amidst a disquieting cloud of mystery and vain conjecture.

Among the discriminating few who frequented the Cabot Museum this relic of an elder, forgotten world soon acquired an unholy fame, though the institution's seclusion and quiet policy prevented it from becoming a popular sensation of the "Cardiff Giant" sort. In the last century the art of vulgar ballyhoo had not invaded the field of scholarship to the extent it has now succeeded in doing. Naturally, savants of various kinds tried their best to classify the frightful object, though always without success. Theories of a bygone Pacific civilization, of which the Easter Island images and the megalithic masonry of Ponape and Nan-Matal are conceivable vestiges, were freely circulated among students, and learned journals carried varied and often conflicting speculations on a possible former continent whose peaks survive as the myriad islands of Melanesia and Polynesia. The diversity in dates assigned to the hypothetical vanished culture — or continent—was at once bewildering and amusing; yet some surprizingly relevant allusions were found in certain myths of Tahiti and other islands.

Meanwhile the strange cylinder and its baffling scroll of unknown hieroglyphs, carefully preserved in the museum library, received their due share of attention. No question could exist as to their association with the mummy; hence all realized that in the unravelling of their mystery the mystery of the shrivelled horror would in all probability be unravelled as well. The cylinder, about four inches long by seven-eighths of an inch in diameter, was of a queerly iridescent metal utterly defying chemical analysis and seemingly impervious to all reagents. It was tightly fitted with a cap of the same substance, and bore engraved figurings of an evidently decorative and possibly symbolic nature—conventional designs which seemed to follow a peculiarly alien, paradoxical, and doubtfully describable system of geometry.

Not less mysterious was the scroll it contained—a neat roll of some thin, bluish-white, unanalyzable membrane, coiled round a slim rod of metal like that of the cylinder, and unwinding to a length of some two feet. The large, bold hieroglyphs, extending in a narrow line down the center of the scroll and penned or painted with a gray pigment defying analysis, resembled nothing known to linguists and paleographers, and could not

be deciphered despite the transmission of photographic copies to every living expert in the given field.

It is true that a few scholars, unusually versed in the literature of occultism and magic, found vague resemblances between some of the hieroglyphs and certain primal symbols described or cited in two or three very ancient, obscure, and esoteric texts such as the *Book of Eibon,* reputed to descend from forgotten Hyperborea; the Pnakotic fragments, alleged to be prehuman; and the monstrous and forbidden *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred. None of these resemblances, however, was beyond dispute; and because of the prevailing low estimation of occult studies, no effort was made to circulate copies of the hieroglyphs among mystical specialists. Had such circulation occurred at this early date, the later history of the case might have been very different; indeed, a glance at the hieroglyphs by any reader of von Junzt's horrible *Nameless Cults* would have established a linkage of unmistakable significance. At this period, however, the readers of that monstrous blasphemy were exceedingly few; copies having been incredibly scarce in the interval between the suppressions of the original Düsseldorf edition (1839) and of the Bridewell translation (1845) and the publication of the expurgated reprint by the Golden Goblin Press in 1909. Practically speaking, no occultist or student of the primal past's esoteric lore had his attention called to the strange scroll until the recent outburst of sensational journalism which precipitated the horrible climax.

2

THUS matters glided along for a half-century following the installation of the frightful mummy at the museum. The gruesome object had a local celebrity among cultivated Bostonians, but no more than that; while the very existence of the cylinder and scroll—after a decade of futile research—was virtually forgotten. So quiet and conservative was the Cabot Museum that no reporter or feature writer ever thought of invading its uneventful precincts for rabble-tickling material.

The invasion of ballyhoo commenced in the spring of 1931, when a purchase of somewhat spectacular nature—that of the strange objects and inexplicably preserved bodies found in crypts beneath the almost vanished and evilly famous ruins of Château Faussesflammes, in Averoigne, France—brought the museum prominently into the news columns. True to its "hustling" policy, the *Boston Pillar* sent a Sunday feature writer to cover the incident and pad it with an exaggerated general account of the institution itself; and this young man—Stuart Reynolds by name—hit upon the nameless mummy as a potential sensation far surpassing the recent acquisitions nominally forming his chief assignment. A smattering of theosophical lore, and a fondness for the speculations of such writers as Colonel Churchward and Lewis Spence concerning lost continents and primal forgotten civilizations, made Reynolds especially alert toward any eonian relic like the unknown mummy.

At the museum the reporter made himself a nuisance through constant and not always intelligent questionings and endless demands for the movement of encased objects to permit photographs from unusual angles. In the basement library room he pored endlessly over the strange metal cylinder and its membranous scroll, photographing them from every angle and securing pictures of every bit of the weird hieroglyphed text. He likewise asked to see all books with any bearing whatever on the subject of primal cul-

tures and sunken continents—sitting for three hours taking notes, and leaving only in order to hasten to Cambridge for a sight (if permission were granted) of the abhorred and forbidden *Necronomicon* at the Widener Library.

On April fifth the article appeared in the Sunday *Pillar*, smothered in photographs of mummy, cylinder, and hieroglyphed scroll, and couched in the peculiarly simpering, infantile style which the *Pillar* affects for the benefit of its vast and mentally immature clientele. Full of inaccuracies, exaggerations, and sensationalism, it was precisely the sort of thing to stir the brainless and fickle interest of the herd—and as a result the once quiet museum began to be swarmed with chattering and vacuously staring throngs such as its stately corridors had never known before.

There were scholarly and intelligent visitors, too, despite the puerility of the article the pictures had spoken for themselves—and many persons of mature attainments sometimes see the *Pillar* by accident. I recall one very strange character who appeared during November—a dark, turbaned and bushily bearded man with a labored, unnatural voice, curiously expressionless face, clumsy hands covered with absurd white mittens, who gave a squalid West End address and called himself "Swami Chandraputra". This fellow was unbelievably erudite in occult lore and seemed profoundly and solemnly moved by the resemblance of the hieroglyphs on the scroll to certain signs and symbols of a forgotten elder world about which he professed vast intuitive knowledge.

By June, the fame of the mummy and scroll had leaked far beyond Boston, and the museum had inquiries and requests for photographs from occultists and students of arcana all over the world. This was not altogether pleasing to our staff, since we are a scientific institution without sympathy for fantastic dreamers; yet we answered all questions with civility. One result of these catechisms was a highly learned article in *The Occult Review* by the famous New Orleans mystic Etienne-Laurent de Marigny, in which was asserted the complete identity of some of the odd geometrical designs on the iridescent cylinder, and of several of the hieroglyphs on the membranous scroll, with certain ideographs of horrible significance (transcribed from primal monoliths or from the secret rituals of hidden bands of esoteric students and devotees) reproduced in the hellish and suppressed *Black Book* or *Nameless Cults* of von Junzt.

De Marigny recalled the frightful death of von Junzt in 1840, a year after the publication of his terrible volume at Düsseldorf, and commented on his bloodcurdling and partly suspected sources of information. Above all, he emphasized the enormous relevance of the tales with which von Junzt linked most of the monstrous ideographs he had reproduced. That these tales, in which a cylinder and scroll were expressly mentioned, held a remarkable suggestion of relationship to the things at the museum, no one could deny; yet they were of such breath-taking extravagance — involving such unbelievable sweeps of time and such fantastic anomalies of a forgotten elder world—that one could much more easily admire than believe them.

Admire them the public certainly did, for copying in the press was universal. Illustrated articles sprang up everywhere, telling or purporting to tell the legends in the *Black Book*, expatiating on the horror of the mummy, comparing the cylinder's designs and the scroll's hieroglyphs with the figures reproduced by von Junzt,

and indulging in the wildest, most sensational and most irrational theories and speculations. Attendance at the museum was trebled, and the widespread nature of the interest was attested by the plethora of mail on the subject—most of it inane and superfluous — received at the museum. Apparently the mummy and its origin formed—for imaginative people—a close rival to the depression as chief topic of 1931 and 1932. For my own part, the principal effect of the furor was to make me read von Junzt's monstrous volume in the Golden Goblin edition—a perusal which left me dizzy and nauseated, yet thankful that I had not seen the utter infamy of the unexpurgated text.

3

THE archaic whispers reflected in the *Black Book* and linked with designs and symbols so closely akin to what the mysterious scroll and cylinder bore, were indeed of a character to hold one spellbound and not a little awestruck. Leaping an incredible gulf of time—behind all the civilizations, races, and lands we know—they clustered round a vanished nation and a vanished continent of the misty, fabulous dawn-years . . . that to which legend has given the name of Mu, and which old tablets in the primal Naacal tongue speak of as flourishing 200,000 years ago, when Europe harbored only hybrid entities, and lost Hyperborea knew the nameless worship of black amorphous Tsathoggua.

There was mention of a kingdom or province called K'naa in a very ancient land where the first human people had found monstrous ruins left by those who had dwelt there before—vague waves of unknown entities which had filtered down from the stars and lived out their eons on a forgotten, nascent world. K'naa was a sacred place, since from its midst the bleak basalt cliffs of Mount Yaddith-Gho soared starkly into the sky, topped by a gigantic fortress of cyclopean stone, infinitely older than mankind and built by the alien spawn of the dark planet Yuggoth, which had colonized the earth before the birth of terrestrial life.

The spawn of Yuggoth had perished eons before, but had left behind them one monstrous and terrible living thing which could never die—their hellish god or patron demon Ghatanothoa, which lowered and brooded eternally though unseen in the crypts beneath that fortress on Yaddith-Gho. No human creature had ever climbed Yaddith-Gho or seen that blasphemous fortress except as a distant and geometrically abnormal outline against the sky; yet most agreed that Ghatanothoa was still there, wallowing and burrowing in unsuspected abysses beneath the megalithic walls. There were always those who believed that sacrifices must be made to Ghatanothoa, lest it crawl out of its hidden abysses and waddle horribly through the world of men as it had once waddled through the primal world of the Yuggoth-spawn.

People said that if no victims were offered, Ghatanothoa would ooze up to the light of day and lumber down the basalt cliffs of Yaddith-Gho bringing doom to all it might encounter. For no living thing could behold Ghatanothoa, or even a perfect graven image of Ghatanothoa, however small, without suffering a change more horrible than death itself. Sight of the god, or its image, as all the legends of Yuggoth-spawn agreed, meant paralysis and petrifaction of a singularly shocking sort, in which the victim was turned to stone and leather on the outside, while the brain within remained perpetually alive—horribly fixed

and prisoned through the ages, and maddeningly conscious of the passage of interminable epochs of helpless inaction till chance and time might complete the decay of the petrified shell and leave it exposed to die. Most brains, of course, would go mad long before this eon-deferred release could arrive. No human eyes, it was said, had ever glimpsed Ghatanothoa, though the danger was as great now as it had been for the Yuggoth-spawn.

And so there was a cult in K'naa which worshipped Ghatanothoa and each year sacrificed to it twelve young warriors and twelve young maidens. These victims were offered up on flaming altars in the marble temple near the mountain's base, for none dared climb Yaddith-Gho's basalt cliffs or draw near to the cyclopean pre-human stronghold on its crest. Vast was the power of the priests of Ghatanothoa, since upon them alone depended the preservation of K'naa and of all the land of Mu from the petrifying emergence of Ghatanothoa out of its unknown burrows.

There were in the land a hundred priests of the Dark God, under Imash-Mo the High Priest, who walked before King Thabou at the Nath-feast, and stood proudly whilst the King knelt at the Dhoric shrine. Each priest had a marble house, a chest of gold, two hundred slaves, and a hundred concubines, besides immunity from civil law and the power of life and death over all in K'naa save the priests of the King. Yet in spite of these defenders there was ever a fear in the land lest Ghatanothoa slither up from the depths and lurch viciously down the mountain to bring horror and petrifaction to mankind. In the latter years the priests forbade men even to guess or imagine what its frightful aspect might be.

It was in the Year of the Red Moon (estimated as B. C. 173,148 by von Junzt) that a human being first dared to breathe defiance against Ghatanothoa and its nameless menace. This bold heretic was T'yog, High Priest of Shub-Niggurath and guardian of the copper temple of the Goat With a Thousand Young. T'yog had thought long on the powers of the various gods, and had had strange dreams and revelations touching the life of this and earlier worlds. In the end he felt sure that the gods friendly to man could be arrayed against the hostile gods, and believed that Shub-Niggurath, Nug, and Yeb, as well as Yig the Serpent-god, were ready to take sides with man against the tyranny and presumption of Ghatanothoa.

Inspired by the Mother Goddess, T'yog wrote down a strange formula in the hieratic Naacal of his order, which he believed would keep the possessor immune from the Dark God's petrifying power. With this protection, he reflected, it might be possible for a bold man to climb the dreaded basalt cliffs and—first of all human beings—enter the cyclopean fortress beneath which Ghatanothoa reputedly brooded. Face to face with the god, and with the power of Shub-Niggurath and her sons on his side, T'yog believed that he might be able to bring it to terms and at last deliver mankind from its brooding menace. With humanity freed through his efforts, there would be no limit to the honors he might claim. All the honors of the priests of Ghatanothoa would perforce be transferred to him; and even kingship or godhood might conceivably be within his reach.

So T'yog wrote his protective formula on a scroll of *pthagon* membrane (according to von Junzt, the inner skin of the extinct yakith-lizard) and enclosed it in a carven cylinder of *lagh* metal—the

metal brought by the Elder Ones from Yuggoth, and found in no mine of earth. This charm, carried in his robe, would make him proof against the menace of Ghatanothoa—it would even restore the Dark God's petrified victims if that monstrous entity should ever emerge and begin its devastations. Thus he proposed to go up the shunned and man-untrodden mountain, invade the alien-angled citadel of cyclopean stone, and confront the shocking devil-entity in its lair. Of what would follow, he could not even guess; but the hope of being mankind's savior lent strength to his will.

He had, however, reckoned without the jealousy and self-interest of Ghatanothoa's pampered priests. No sooner did they hear of his plan than—fearful for their prestige and privilege in case the Demon-God should be dethroned—they set up a frantic clamor against the so-called sacrilege, crying that no man might prevail against Ghatanothoa, and that any effort to seek it out would merely provoke it to a hellish onslaught against mankind which no spell or priestcraft could hope to avert. With those cries they hoped to turn the public mind against T'yog; yet such was the people's yearning for freedom from Ghatanothoa, and such their confidence in the skill and zeal of T'yog, that all the protestations came to naught. Even the King, usually a puppet of the priests, refused to forbid T'yog's daring pilgrimage.

It was then that the priests of Ghatanothoa did by stealth what they could not do openly. One night Imash-Mo, the High-Priest, stole to T'yog in his temple chamber and took from his sleeping form the metal cylinder; silently drawing out the potent scroll and putting in its place another scroll of great similitude, yet varied enough to have no power against any god or demon. When the cylinder was slipped back into the sleeper's cloak Imash-Mo was content, for he knew T'yog was little likely to study that cylinder's contents again. Thinking himself protected by the true scroll, the heretic would march up the forbidden mountain and into the Evil Presence—and Ghatanothoa, unchecked by any magic, would take care of the rest.

It would no longer be needful for Ghatanothoa's priests to preach against the defiance. Let T'yog go his way and meet his doom. And secretly, the priests would always cherish the stolen scroll—the true and potent charm—handing it down from one High-Priest to another for use in any dim future when it might be needful to contravene the Devil-God's will. So the rest of the night Imash-Mo slept in great peace, with the true scroll in a new cylinder fashioned for its harborage.

It was at dawn on the Day of the Sky-Flames (nomenclature undefined by von Junzt) that T'yog, amidst the prayers and chanting of the people and with King Thabou's blessing on his head, started up the dreaded mountain with a staff of tlath-wood in his right hand. Within his robe was the cylinder holding what he thought to be the true charm—for he had indeed failed to find out the imposture. Nor did he see any irony in the prayers which Imash-Mo and the other priests of Ghatanothoa intoned for his safety and success.

All that morning the people stood and watched as T'yog's dwindling form struggled up the shunned basalt slope hitherto alien to men's footsteps, and many stayed watching long after he had vanished where a perilous ledge led round to the mountain's hidden side. That night a few sensitive dreamers thought they heard a faint tremor con-

vulsing the hated peak; though most ridiculed them for the statement. Next day vast crowds watched the mountain and prayed, and wondered how soon T'yog would return. And so the next day, and the next. For weeks they hoped and waited, and then they wept. Nor did any one ever see T'yog, who would have saved mankind from fears, again.

Thereafter men shuddered at T'yog's presumption, and tried not to think of the punishment his impiety had met. And the priests of Ghatanothoa smiled to those who might resent the god's will or challenge its right to the sacrifices. In later years the ruse of Imash-Mo became known to the people; yet the knowledge availed not to change the general feeling that Ghatanothoa were better left alone. None ever dared defy it again. And so the ages rolled on, and King succeeded King, and High-Priest succeeded High-Priest, and nations rose and decayed, and lands rose above the sea and returned into the sea. And with many millennia decay fell upon K'naa—till at last on a hideous day of storm and thunder, terrific rumbling and mountain-high waves, all the land of Mu sank into the sea for ever.

Yet down the later eons thin streams of ancient secrets trickled. In distant lands there met together gray-faced fugitives who had survived the sea-fiend's rage, and strange skies drank the smoke of altars reared to vanished gods and demons. Though none knew to what bottomless deep the sacred peak and cyclopean fortress of dreaded Ghatanothoa had sunk, there were still those who mumbled its name and offered to it nameless sacrifices lest it bubble up through leagues of ocean and shamble among men spreading horror and petrifaction.

Around the scattered priests grew the rudiments of a dark and secret cult—secret because the people of the new lands had other gods and devils, and thought only evil of elder and alien ones—and within that cult many hideous things were done, and many strange objects cherished. It was whispered that a certain line of elusive priests still harbored the true charm against Ghatanothoa which Imash-Mo stole from the sleeping T'yog; though none remained who could read or understand the cryptic syllables, or who could even guess in what part of the world the lost K'naa, the dreaded peak of Yaddith-Gho, and the titan fortress of the Devil-God had lain.

Though it flourished chiefly in those Pacific regions around which Mu itself had once stretched, there were rumors of the hidden and detested cult of Ghatanothoa in ill-fated Atlantis, and on the abhorred plateau of Leng. Von Junzt implied its presence in the fabled subterrene kingdom of K'nyan, and gave clear evidence that it had penetrated Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, China, the forgotten Semite empires of Africa, and Mexico and Peru in the New World. That it had a strong connection with the witchcraft movement in Europe, against which the bulls of popes were vainly directed, he more than strongly hinted. The West, however, was never favorable to its growth; and public indignation—aroused by glimpses of hideous rites and nameless sacrifices—wholly stamped out many of its branches. In the end it became a hunted, doubly furtive underground affair—yet never could its nucleus be quite exterminated. It always survived somehow, chiefly in the Far East and on the Pacific Islands, where its teachings became merged into the esoteric lore of the Polynesian *Areoi*.

Von Junzt gave subtle and disquieting hints of actual contact with the cult; so that as I read I shuddered at what was

rumored about his death. He spoke of the growth of certain ideas regarding the appearance of the Devil-God—a creature which no human being (unless it were the too-daring T'yog, who had never returned) had ever seen—and contrasted this habit of speculation with the taboo prevailing in ancient Mu against any attempt to imagine what the horror looked like. There was a peculiar fearfulness about the devotees' awed and fascinated whispers on this subject—whispers heavy with morbid curiosity concerning the precise nature of what T'yog might have confronted in that frightful prehuman edifice on the dreaded and now-sunken mountains before the end (if it was an end) finally came—and I felt oddly disturbed by the German scholar's oblique and insidious references to this topic.

Scarcely less disturbing were von Junzt's conjectures on the whereabouts of the stolen scroll of cantrips against Ghatanothoa, and on the ultimate uses to which this scroll might be put. Despite all my assurance that the whole matter was purely mythical, I could not help shivering at the notion of a latter-day emergence of the monstrous god, and at the picture of an humanity turned suddenly to a race of abnormal statues, each encasing a living brain doomed to inert and helpless consciousness for untold eons of futurity. The old Düsseldorf savant had a poisonous way of suggesting more than he stated, and I could understand why his damnable book was suppressed in so many countries as blasphemous, dangerous, and unclean.

I writhed with repulsion, yet the thing exerted an unholy fascination; and I could not lay it down till I had finished it. The alleged reproductions of designs and ideographs from Mu were marvellously and startlingly like the markings on the strange cylinder and the characters on the scroll, and the whole account teemed with details having vague, irritating suggestions of resemblance to things connected with the hideous mummy. The cylinder and scroll—the Pacific setting—the persistent notion of old Captain Weatherbee that the cyclopean crypt where the mummy was found had once lain under a vast building . . . somehow I was vaguely glad that the volcanic island had sunk before that massive suggestion of a trap-door could be opened.

4

WHAT I read in the *Black Book* formed a fiendishly apt preparation for the news items and closer events which began to force themselves upon me in the spring of 1932. I can scarcely recall just when the increasingly frequent reports of police action against the odd and fantastical religious cults in the Orient and elsewhere commenced to impress me; but by May or June I realized that there was, all over the world, a surprizing and unwonted burst of activity on the part of bizarre, furtive, and esoteric mystical organizations ordinarily quiescent and seldom heard from.

It is not likely that I would have connected these reports with either the hints of von Junzt or the popular furor over the mummy and cylinder in the museum, but for certain significant syllables and persistent resemblances—sensationally dwelt upon by the press—in the rites and speeches of the various secret celebrants brought to public attention. As it was, I could not help remarking with disquiet the frequent recurrence of a name—in various corrupt forms—which seemed to constitute a focal point of all the cult worship, and which was obviously regarded with a singular mixture of reverence and terror. Some of the forms quoted

were G'tanta, Tanotah, Than-Tha, Gatan, and Ktan-Tah—and it did not require the suggestions of my now numerous occultist correspondents to make me see in these variants a hideous and suggestive kinship to the monstrous name rendered by von Junzt at Ghatanothoa.

There were other disquieting features, too. Again and again the reports cited vague, awestruck references to a "true scroll"—something on which tremendous consequences seemed to hinge, and which was mentioned as being in the custody of a certain "Nagob", whoever and whatever he might be. Likewise, there was an insistent repetition of a name which sounded like Tog, Tiok, Yog, Zob, or Yob, and which my more and more excited consciousness involuntarily linked with the name of the hapless heretic T'yog as given in the *Black Book*. This name was usually uttered in connection with such cryptical phrases as "It is none other than he," "He had looked upon its face," "He knows all, though he can neither see nor feel," "He has brought the memory down through the eons," "The true scroll will release him," "Nagob has the true scroll," "He can tell where to find it."

Something very queer was undoubtedly in the air, and I did not wonder when my occultist correspondents, as well as the sensational Sunday papers, began to connect the new abnormal stirrings with the legends of Mu on the one hand, and with the frightful mummy's recent exploitation on the other hand. The widespread articles in the first wave of press publicity, with their insistent linkage of the mummy, cylinder, and scroll with the tale in the *Black Book*, and their crazily fantastic speculations about the whole matter, might very well have roused the latent fanaticism in hundreds of those furtive groups of exotic devotees with which our complex world abounds. Nor did the papers cease adding fuel to the flames—for the stories on the cult-stirrings were even wilder than the earlier series of yarns.

As the summer drew on, attendants noticed a curious new element among the throngs of visitors which—after a lull following the first burst of publicity—were again drawn to the museum by the second furor. More and more frequently there were persons of strange and exotic aspect — swarthy Asiatics, long-haired nondescripts, and bearded brown men who seemed unused to European clothes —who would invariably inquire for the hall of mummies and would subsequently be found staring at the hideous Pacific specimen in a veritable ecstasy of fascination. Some quiet, sinister undercurrent in this flood of eccentric foreigners seemed to impress all the guards, and I myself was far from undisturbed. I could not help thinking of the prevailing cult-stirrings among just such exotics as these—and the connection of those stirrings with myths all too close to the frightful mummy and its cylinder scroll.

At times I was half tempted to withdraw the mummy from exhibition—especially when an attendant told me that he had several times glimpsed strangers making odd obeisances before it, and had overheard singsong mutterings which sounded like chants or rituals addressed to it at hours when the visiting throngs were somewhat thinned. One of the guards acquired a queer nervous hallucination about the petrified horror in the lone glass case, alleging that he could see from day to day certain vague, subtle, and infinitely slight changes in the frantic flexion of the bony claws, and in the fear-crazed expression of the leathery face. He could not get rid of the loathsome idea that those horrible, bulging eyes were about to pop suddenly open.

It was early in September, when the curious crowds had lessened and the hall of mummies was sometimes vacant, that the attempt to get at the mummy by cutting the glass of its case was made. The culprit, a swarthy Polynesian, was spied in time by a guard, and was overpowered before any damage occurred. Upon investigation the fellow turned out to be a Hawaiian notorious for his activity in certain underground religious cults, and having a considerable police record in connection with abnormal and inhuman rites and sacrifices. Some of the papers found in his room were highly puzzling and disturbing, including many sheets covered with hieroglyphs closely resembling those on the scroll at the museum and in the *Black Book* of von Junzt; but regarding these things he could not be prevailed upon to speak.

Scarcely a week after this incident, another attempt to get at the mummy—this time by tampering with the lock of its case—resulted in a second arrest. The offender, a Cingalese, had as long and unsavory a record of loathsome cult activities as the Hawaiian had possessed, and displayed a kindred unwillingness to talk to the police. What made this case doubly and darkly interesting was that a guard had noticed this man several times before, and had heard him addressing to the mummy a peculiar chant containing unmistakable repetitions of the word "T'yog." As a result of this affair I doubled the guards in the hall of mummies, and ordered them never to leave the now notorious specimen out of sight, even for a moment.

As may well be imagined, the press made much of these two incidents, reviewing its talk of primal and fabulous Mu, and claiming boldly that the hideous mummy was none other than the daring heretic T'yog, petrified by something he had seen in the pre-human citadel he had invaded, and preserved intact through 175,000 years of our planet's turbulent history. That the strange devotees represented cults descended from Mu, and that they were worshipping the mmmy—or perhaps even seeking to awaken it to life by spells and incantations—was emphasized and reiterated in the most sensational fashion.

Writers exploited the insistence of the old legends that the *brain* of Ghatanothoa's petrified victims remained conscious and unaffected — a point which served as a basis for the wildest and most improbable speculations. The mention of a "true scroll" also received due attention —it being the prevailing popular theory that T'yog's stolen charm against Ghatanothoa was somewhere in existence, and that cult-members were trying to bring it into contact with T'yog himself for some purpose of their own. One result of this exploitation was that a third wave of gaping visitors began flooding the museum and staring at the hellish mummy which served as a nucleus for the whole strange and disturbing affair.

It was among this wave of spectators—many of whom made repeated visits—that talk of the mummy's vaguely changing aspect first began to be widespread. I suppose—despite the disturbing notion of the nervous guard some months before —that the museum's personnel was too well used to the constant sight of odd shapes to pay close attention to details; in any case, it was the excited whispers of visitors which at length aroused the guards to the subtle mutation which was apparently in progress. Almost simultaneously the press got hold of it—with blatant results which can well be imagined.

Naturally, I gave the matter my most careful observation, and by the middle of

October decided that a definite disintegration of the mummy was under way. Through some chemical or physical influence in the air, the half-stony, half-leathery fibers seemed to be gradually relaxing, causing distinct variations in the angles of the limbs and in certain details of the fear-twisted facial expression. After a half-century of perfect preservation this was a highly disconcerting development, and I had the museum's taxidermist, Doctor Moore, go carefully over the gruesome object several times. He reported a general relaxation and softening, and gave the thing two or three astringent sprayings, but did not dare to attempt anything drastic lest there be a sudden crumbling and accelerated decay.

The effect of all this upon the gaping crowds was curious. Heretofore each new sensation sprung by the press had brought a fresh wave of staring and whispering visitors, but now — though the papers blathered endlessly about the mummy's changes—the public seemed to have acquired a definite sense of fear which outranked even its morbid curiosity. People seemed to feel that a sinister aura hovered over the museum, and from a high peak the attendance fell to a level distinctly below normal. This lessened attendance gave added prominence to the stream of freakish foreigners who continued to infest the place, and whose numbers seemed in no way diminished.

On November eighteenth a Peruvian of Indian blood suffered a strange hysterical or epileptic seizure in front of the mummy, afterward shrieking from his hospital cot, "It tried to open its eyes!—T'yog tried to open his eyes and stare at me!" I was by this time on the point of removing the object from exhibition, but permitted myself to be overruled at a meeting of our very conservative directors. However, I could see that the museum was beginning to acquire an unholy reputation in its austere and quiet neighborhood. After this incident I gave instructions that no one be allowed to pause before the monstrous Pacific relic for more than a few minutes at a time.

It was on November twenty-fourth, after the museum's five o'clock closing, that one of the guards noticed a minute opening of the mummy's eyes. The phenomenon was very slight—nothing but a thin crescent of cornea being visible in either eye—but it was none the less of the highest interest. Doctor Moore, having been summoned hastily, was about to study the exposed bits of eyeball with a magnifier when his handling of the mummy caused the leathery lids to fall tightly shut again. All gentle efforts to open them failed, and the taxidermist did not dare to apply drastic measures. When he notified me of all this by telephone I felt a sense of mounting dread hard to reconcile with the apparently simple event concerned. For a moment I could share the popular impression that some evil, amorphous blight from unplumbed deeps of time and space hung murkily and menacingly over the museum.

Two nights later a sullen Filipino was trying to secrete himself in the museum at closing time. Arrested and taken to the station, he refused even to give his name, and was detained as a suspicious person. Meanwhile the strict surveillance of the mummy seemed to discourage the odd hordes of foreigners from haunting it. At least, the number of exotic visitors distinctly fell off after the enforcement of the "move along" order.

It was during the early morning hours of Thursday, December first, that a terrible climax developed. At about one o'clock horrible screams of mortal fright and agony were heard issuing from the museum, and a series of frantic telephone

calls from neighbors brought to the scene quickly and simultaneously a squad of police and several museum officials, including myself. Some of the policemen surrounded the building while others, with the officials, cautiously entered. In the main corridor we found the night watchman strangled to death—a bit of East Indian hemp still knotted around his neck—and realized that despite all precautions some darkly evil intruder or intruders had gained access to the place. Now, however, a tomb-like silence enfolded everything and we almost feared to advance upstairs to the fateful wing where we knew the core of the trouble must lurk. We felt a bit more steadied after flooding the building with light from the central switches in the corridor, and finally crept reluctantly up the curving staircase and through a lofty archway to the hall of mummies.

5

It is from this point onward that reports of the hideous case have been censored—for we have all agreed that no good can be accomplished by a public knowledge of those terrestrial conditions implied by the further developments. I have said that we flooded the whole building with light before our ascent. Now, beneath the beams that beat down on the glistening cases and their gruesome contents, we saw outspread a mute horror whose baffling details testified to happenings utterly beyond our comprehension. There were two intruders—who we afterward agreed must have hidden in the building before closing time—but they would never be executed for the watchman's murder. They had already paid the penalty.

One was a Burmese and the other a Fiji-Islander—both known to the police for their share in frightful and repulsive cult activities. They were dead, and the more we examined them the more utterly monstrous and unnamable we felt their manner of death to be. On both faces was a more wholly frantic and inhuman look of fright than even the oldest policeman had ever seen before; yet in the state of the two bodies there were vast and significant differences.

The Burmese lay collapsed close to the nameless mummy's case, from which a square of glass had been neatly cut. In his right hand was a scroll of bluish membrane which I at once saw was covered with grayish hieroglyphs—almost a duplicate of the scroll in the strange cylinder in the library downstairs, though later study brought out subtle differences. There was no mark of violence on the body, and in view of the desperate, agonized expression on the twisted face we could only conclude that the man died of sheer fright.

It was the closely adjacent Fijian, though, that gave us the profoundest shock. One of the policemen was the first to feel of him, and the cry of fright he emitted added another shudder to that neighborhood's night of terror. We ought to have known from the lethal grayness of the once-black, fear-twisted face, and of the bony hands—one of which still clutched an electric torch—that something was hideously wrong; yet every one of us was unprepared for what that officer's hesitant touch disclosed. Even now I can think of it only with a paroxysm of dread and repulsion. To be brief—the hapless invader, who less than an hour before had been a sturdy living Melanesian bent on unknown evils, was now a rigid, ash-gray figure of stony, leathery petrifaction, in every respect identical with the crouching, eon-old blasphemy in the violated glass case.

Yet that was not the worst. Crowning

all other horrors, and indeed seizing our shocked attention before we turned to the bodies on the floor, was the state of the frightful mummy. No longer could its changes be called vague and subtle, for it had now made radical shifts of posture. It had sagged and slumped with a curious loss of rigidity; its bony claws had sunk until they no longer even partly covered its leathery, fear-crazed face; and —God help us!—*its hellish bulging eyes had popped wide open, and seemed to be staring directly at the two intruders who had died of fright or worse.*

That ghastly, dead-fish stare was hideously mesmerizing, and it haunted us all the time we were examining the bodies of the invaders. Its effect on our nerves was damnably queer, for we somehow felt a curious rigidity creeping over us and hampering our simplest motions—a rigidity which later vanished very oddly when we passed the hieroglyphed scroll around for inspection. Every now and then I felt my gaze drawn irresistibly toward those horrible bulging eyes in the case, and when I returned to study them after viewing the bodies I thought I detected something very singular about the glassy surface of the dark and marvellously well-preserved pupils. The more I looked, the more fascinated I became; and at last I went down to the office—despite that strange stiffness in my limbs — and brought up a strong multiple magnifying glass. With this I commenced a very close and careful survey of the fishy pupils, while the others crowded expectantly around.

I had always been rather skeptical of the theory that scenes and objects become photographed on the retina of the eye in cases of death or coma; yet no sooner did I look through the lens than I realized the presence of some sort of image other than the room's reflection in the glassy, bulging optics of this nameless spawn of the eons. Certainly, there was a dimly outlined scene on the age-old retinal surface, and I could not doubt that it formed the last thing on which those eyes had looked in life—countless millennia ago. It seemed to be steadily fading, and I fumbled with the magnifier in order to shift another lens into place. Yet it must have been accurate and clear-cut; even if infinitesimally small, when—in response to some evil spell or act connected with their visit—it had confronted those intruders who were frightened to death. With the extra lens I could make out many details formerly invisible, and the awed group around me hung on the flood of words with which I tried to tell what I saw.

For here, in the year 1932, a man in the city of Boston was looking on something which belonged to an unknown and utterly alien world—a world that vanished from existence and normal memory eons ago. There was a vast room—a chamber of cyclopean masonry—and I seemed to be viewing it from one of its corners. On the walls were carvings so hideous that even in this imperfect image their stark blasphemousness and bestiality sickened me. I could not believe that the carvers of these things were human, or that they had ever seen human beings when they shaped the frightful outlines which leered at the beholder. In the center of the chamber was a colossal trapdoor of stone, pushed upward to permit the emergence of some object from below. The object should have been clearly visible—indeed, must have been when the eyes first opened before the fear-stricken intruders—though under my lenses it was merely a monstrous blur.

As it happened, I was studying the right eye only when I brought the extra magnification into play. A moment later

I wished fervently that my search had ended there. As it was, however, the zeal of discovery and revelation was upon me, and I shifted my powerful lenses to the mummy's left eye in the hope of finding the image less faded on that retina. My hands, trembling with excitement and unnaturally stiff from some obscure influence, were slow in bringing the magnifier into focus, but a moment later I realized that the image was less faded than in the other eye. I saw in a morbid flash of half-distinctness the insufferable thing which was welling up through the prodigious trap-door in that cyclopean, immemorially archaic crypt of a lost world—and fell fainting with an inarticulate shriek of which I am not even ashamed.

By the time I revived there was no distinct image of anything in either eye of the monstrous mummy. Sergeant Keefe of the police looked with my glass, for I could not bring myself to face that abnormal entity again. And I thanked all the powers of the cosmos that I had not looked earlier than I did. It took all my resolution, and a great deal of solicitation, to make me relate what I had glimpsed in that hideous moment of revelation. Indeed, I could not speak till we had all adjourned to the office below, out of sight of that demoniac thing which could not be. For I had begun to harbor the most terrible and fantastic notions about the mummy and its glassy, bulging eyes—that it had a kind of hellish consciousness, seeing all that occurred before it and trying vainly to communicate some frightful message from the gulfs of time. That meant madness—but at last I thought I might be better off if I told what I had half-seen.

After all, it was not a long thing to tell. Oozing and surging up out of that yawning trap-door in the cyclopean crypt I had glimpsed such an unbelievable behemothic monstrosity that I could not doubt the power of its original to kill with its mere sight. Even now I can not begin to suggest it with any words at my command. I might call it gigantic—tentacled—proboscidian—octopus-eyed—semi-amorphous—plastic—partly squamous and partly rugose—ugh! But nothing I could say could even adumbrate the loathsome, unholy, non-human, extragalactic horror and hatefulness and unutterable evil of that forbidden spawn of black chaos and illimitable night. As I write these words the associated mental image causes me to lean back faint and nauseated. As I told of the sight to the men around me in the office, I had to fight to preserve the consciousness I had regained.

Nor were my hearers much less moved. Not a man spoke above a whisper for a full quarter-hour, and there were awed, half-furtive references to the frightful lore in the *Black Book,* to the recent newspaper tales of cult-stirrings, and to the sinister events in the museum. Ghatanothoa. . . . Even its smallest perfect image could petrify — T'yog — the false scroll—he never came back—the true scroll which could fully or partly undo the petrifaction — did it survive? — the hellish cults—the phrases overheard—"It is none other than he"—"He had looked upon its face"—"He knows all, though he can neither see nor feel"—"He has brought the memory down through the eons"—"The true scroll will release him"—"Nagob has the true scroll"—"He can tell where to find it."

Only the healing grayness of the dawn brought us back to sanity; a sanity which made of that glimpse of mine a closed topic—something not to be explained or thought of again.

We gave out only partial reports to the

press, and later on co-operated with the papers in making other suppressions. For example, when the autopsy showed the brain and several other internal organs of the petrified Fijian to be fresh and unpetrified, though hermetically sealed by the petrifaction of the exterior flesh—an anomaly about which physicians are still guardedly and bewilderedly debating—we did not wish a furor to be started. We knew too well what the yellow journals, remembering what was said of the intact-brained and still-conscious state of Ghatanothoa's stony-leathery victims, would make of this detail.

As matters stood, they pointed out that the man who had held the hieroglyphed scroll—and who had evidently thrust it at the mummy through the opening in the case—was not petrified, while the man who had *not* held it was. When they demanded that we make certain experiments—applying the scroll both to the stony-leathery body of the Fijian and to the mummy itself—we indignantly refused to abet such superstitious notions. Of course, the mummy was withdrawn from public view and transferred to the museum laboratory awaiting a really scientific examination before some suitable medical authority. Remembering past events, we kept it under a strict guard; but even so, an attempt was made to enter the museum at 2:25 a. m. on December fifth. Prompt working of the burglar alarm frustrated the design, though unfortunately the criminal or criminals escaped.

That no hint of anything further ever reached the public, I am profoundly thankful. I wish devoutly that there were nothing more to tell. There will, of course, be leaks, and if anything happens to me I do not know what my executors will do with this manuscript; but at least the case will not be painfully fresh in the multitude's memory when the revelation comes. Besides, no one will believe the facts when they are finally told. That is the curious thing about the multitude. When their yellow press makes hints, they are ready to swallow anything; but when a stupendous and abnormal revelation is actually made, they laugh it aside as a lie. For the sake of general sanity it is probably better so.

I HAVE said that a scientific examination of the frightful mummy was planned. This took place on December eighth, exactly a week after the hideous culmination of events, and was conducted by the eminent Doctor William Minot, in conjunction with Wentworth Moore, Sc. D., taxidermist of the museum. Doctor Minot had witnessed the autopsy of the oddly petrified Fijian the week before. There were also present Messrs. Lawrence Cabot and Dudley Saltonstall of the museum's trustees, Doctors Mason, Wells, and Carver of the museum staff, two representatives of the press, and myself. During the week the condition of the hideous specimen had not visibly changed, though some relaxation of its fibers caused the position of the glassy, open eyes to shift slightly from time to time. All of the staff dreaded to look at the thing—for its suggestion of quiet, conscious watching had become intolerable—and it was only with an effort that I could bring myself to attend the examination.

Doctor Minot arrived shortly after 1:00 p. m., and within a few minutes began his survey of the mummy. Considerable disintegration took place under his hands, and in view of this—and of what we told him concerning the gradual relaxation of the specimen since the first of October—he decided that a thorough dissection ought to be made before the substance was further impaired. The

proper instruments being present in the laboratory equipment, he began at once; exclaiming aloud at the odd, fibrous nature of the gray, mummified substance.

But his exclamation was still louder when he made the first deep incision, for out of that cut there slowly trickled a thick crimson stream whose nature—despite the infinite ages dividing this hellish mummy's life-time from the present—was utterly unmistakable. A few more deft strokes revealed various organs in astonishing degrees of non-petrified preservation—all, indeed, being intact except where injuries to the petrified exterior had brought about malformation or destruction. The resemblance of this condition to that found in the fright-killed Fiji-Islander was so strong that the eminent physician gasped in bewilderment. The perfection of those ghastly bulging eyes was uncanny, and their exact state with respect to petrifaction was very difficult to determine.

At 3:30 p. m. the brain-case was opened — and ten minutes later our stunned group took an oath of secrecy which only such guarded documents as this manuscript will ever modify. Even the two reporters were glad to confirm the silence. *For the opening had revealed a pulsing, living brain.*

The Aztec Ring

By JOHN FLANDERS

A story of the grim and terrible conflict that took place one night in a pawnbroker's shop

JOSHUA GULLICK the pawnbroker was a hard man to deal with.

All day long women crept into his dingy shop, spread out cloaks and overcoats on his counter and murmured pathetically:

"You can see it's almost new, Mr. Gullick. Can't you give me as much as a pound for it?"

To which Joshua Gullick invariably replied, like a parrot:

"Two shillings."

Then the poor woman would burst into tears and tell a sad story of a husband out of work and little children ill. But Joshua Gullick would repeat his litany:

"Two shillings, or you can take your home for elderly gipsy-moths and run along."

In most cases it was the simple truth that the poor woman's husband was scouring the Gravesend docks without digging up a scrap of a job to pay for the family's bread and tea, and that a poor kiddy or two was coughing and moaning in a foul cellar in Battersea or Whitechapel. And the thing usually ended by the woman's taking the two shillings and dragging herself out of the door. But sometimes she would call back some such bitter prophecy as:

"God will punish you, you skinflint!"

But Joshua Gullick, busy pinning a

ticket on the newly acquired garment, did not worry a great deal about God.

One evening a man came into the pawnbroker's shop with a tale of wo which at least was different from the others.

"She can't live another day, and I want so much to put the chain and the little cross back on her neck while she is still conscious. It will be a little bit of consolation——"

Then, with a shudder, he lowered his voice and went on:

"And when—when it's all over—I could bring it back to you."

Joshua Gullick answered very politely:

"Yes indeed, sir, your attachment to your family heirlooms is a real credit to you. But your sister got fourteen shillings on that little ornament, so that she owes me now, with the interest which has accumulated—let's see—two pounds four shillings."

"But I tell you, sir, I haven't a penny—at least not just now——"

"I'm sure you realize," replied the money-lender in the same tone of perfect politeness, "that I am very sorry, especially since I knew your sister well, and honored her for her efforts to support herself by giving piano lessons—but business is business, you know——"

"Listen, Mr. Gullick. I don't know whether I told you that I've just come back from Mexico. You know Mexico is in a terrible way just now. I was getting on very well there and was accumulating a little fortune, when the revolution broke out, and in an hour I was ruined.

"I got back here sick and despairing, pockets empty, not knowing which way to turn to keep from starving. And I found my sister, my poor, gentle little Edith, at the point of death. I know I'll get back on my feet again——"

Joshua Gullick raised his hands to heaven—a heaven shut off by the green ceiling from which hung a motley crew of gibbeted overcoats, tail-coats, women's cloaks and capes, and costumes of every imaginable variety.

"I am an old man, sir, and I am not in a position to speculate on the future."

"But I swear to you you will live long enough to see me bring back the chain and what I owe you on the loan."

But the usurer shook his head energetically.

"I have told you the amount of the debt, sir. It's two pounds four exactly. And my time is valuable."

The man slowly drew off his threadbare overcoat, but Joshua Gullick stopped him with a gesture.

"The most I could possibly let you have on it would be four shillings, and you would still owe me——"

But he never finished his sentence. His eye had chanced to fall on the man's hand, and he caught the sparkle of a gorgeous stone.

"After all, sir, I have a soft heart, and I should be glad to do you a service if I could. I notice you have a handsome ring on your finger there—oh, yes, I can see that it's only an imitation and that it isn't worth much of anything, but I'm sorry for you and I can't—I want to help you, and I should be willing to make a trade with you. You let me have that ring, and I will give you back the chain and the gold cross——"

As this chaffering went on, it had grown dark. The feeble, whistling, twisting little gas jet did not do justice to the change which had suddenly come over the visitor's face, and even if it had, Joshua Gullick would probably not have noticed it, for he had no eyes except for the ring. It was a beautifully shaped ser-

pent of brown metal, encircling a stone which emitted curious red flashes.

"Pawnbroker," said the man slowly, "you say this stone is worth little or nothing?"

"I'd swear it on a Bible!" cried Gullick eagerly.

"You take your oath to it!" said the man in a strange low voice which to anybody but Joshua Gullick would have been ominous, threatening and terrible.

"I take my oath to it," Gullick repeated fervently.

"Here is the ring," said the man.

Gullick scarcely knew how it happened, but the ring seemed to glide off the visitor's finger and around his own before either of the two had made a gesture. But he did not waste much time wondering, he was so filled with bewildered delight at the unbelievably fine business deal he had just concluded.

THE man turned and walked slowly toward the door, playing abstractedly with the little chain and cross as he went. But before he reached the threshold, he turned back.

"Gullick," he said, "I'm very sorry——"

"Bargain's made!" snapped the pawnbroker.

"Oh, I wasn't trying to back out," said the other. "But I have a feeling I ought to warn you——"

By this time Gullick had begun to notice the strange, suppressed excitement in his client's manner and the savage flame in his eyes. The old man squinted cautiously at the half-open drawer in which lay a big Colt revolver with all seven chambers loaded.

"That ring is an Aztec talisman. When you look at it with a magnifying-glass you can see a row of strange signs inscribed on the body of the serpent. The inscription reads that if any one ever secures possession of the ring through dishonest means——"

"Sir," growled the money-lender, "do you mean to insinuate——"

"It was in the Mexican mountains, one moonlight night, that I happened to meet the Indian who owned it. He had a bad case of fever. I had a little quinine with me, not enough, I'm sorry to say, to——"

"Sir," interrupted Gullick, trembling for fear something might still happen to separate him from his bargain, "I never cared for stories of adventure. Good-night!"

"But let me tell you——"

"Good-night!"

"Listen to——"

"Good-night!"

"Very well then, if you *will* have it so," said the man, and disappeared in the darkness and the fog.

Joshua Gullick put up his shutters.

"IT'S strange," he said to himself. "I can't get the thing off my finger."

Like many of his trade, he was an expert in precious stones. But he had never before seen a jewel like this one. And it was after having abandoned his fruitless investigation and after having decided to put the ring away in his safe, that he made the discovery that it could not be removed from his finger.

"My hand must be a little swollen today," he told himself.

And he set about his nightly task of getting ready in a special portfolio the obligations which fell due on the following day.

On the first of next December, I promise to pay to the order of Joshua Gullick the sum of forty pounds——

"Good God! I'm going crazy!"

It was Gullick himself who had uttered this cry. And he had uttered it when he saw the leaping flame devour the note,

which had fallen into the open fireplace —*the note which Gullick himself had thrown into the flames!*

"I'm mad!" he groaned. "I'm mad! I threw it in with my own hands! Oh Lord, Lord, Lord!"

A succession of frantic barks. With a sure and steady aim, he had tossed the whole portfolio into the fire.

He rushed to the grate, and reached for the leather case. The flames were already curling around it—but with a sudden change of direction his hand had shot out toward the open safe, and another package of notes flew into the flames.

"Mad and crazy! Mad and crazy!" he bellowed. "What devil is driving me?"

His hand was fumbling feverishly in the drawers of his safe and hurling paper after paper into the grate. All at once Gullick remembered.

"The ring!"

Ah! the ring clung firmly to his finger, buried in the flesh, half hidden under the livid, swollen tissue.

"No, no," he panted. "I don't want to, I don't——"

He dragged himself across the floor on his knees, pleading with his own hand, which roved back and forth like a crazy wild thing, throwing open account-books, tearing out pages, turning keys in locks, seizing packages of notes and tickets and tossing them into the crackling flames.

Then a furious rage seized him. He noticed in a corner of the room the hatchet with which he split his little supply of kindling.

"I'll chop it off!" he roared. "I'll chop it off!"

With his left hand he gripped the weapon. But the other hand, the hand which was no longer his, tore the dangerous tool free and hurled it across the room.

What a night it was!

TOWARD morning Joshua Gullick, lying exhausted against his empty safe, glared with haggard eyes at the dying fire, glutted with blackened scraps of paper. All at once the terrible hand grew active again. It pulled violently at his left wrist, forced him to rise to his feet, and after feeling around hastily, it took possession of a pen-holder.

I, the undersigned Joshua Gullick, declare all my debtors free of all financial obligation to me. I restore all pledged articles to their owners. And I bequeath all my property to the poor of London. I hereby declare that no one is responsible for my death.

Joshua Gullick stared at the paper. Was it he who had written that? He recognized his own handwriting, his own signature. . . .

His old stubborn shrewdness began to come back to him a little. He saw that he had not the physical strength to defeat the enemy. But perhaps he could outwit that ring finger, after all. . . .

There! His faithful left hand had tossed the crazy paper into the fire.

The right hand seemed to hesitate for a moment. Then it reached for the penholder again, and the document was quickly rewritten. And again—ah!—the left hand undid the insane folly of its fellow-member.

"Good heavens!"

The sharp claws of the right hand dug into the tough flesh of the left. Animated with a diabolical fury, the bewitched hand fought and struggled with its fellow.

The battle was grotesque, desperate, terrible.

Gullick tried in vain to shield his left hand behind his back, in his pockets, under the furniture. The other always found it, clawed it, tore it, twisted it, broke the joints apart. Gullick suffered agonies of pain, and all his spasmodic struggling was unavailing.

At last the rent and broken left hand

hung helpless. And very deliberately and carefully, the right hand once more rewrote the last will and testament of Joshua Gullick. Then, slowly, methodically, it opened the drawer of the counter and took out the big revolver.

Joshua Gullick made no attempt at resistance. His vacant, glassy eyes reflected the yellow gaslight like the eyes of a dead man.

The muzzle of the revolver moved upward toward his temple.

Coming Soon—

SATAN IN EXILE

By ARTHUR WILLIAM BERNAL

A stupendous weird serial novel of a space bandit whose exploits among the planets of our solar system made him a veritable Robin Hood of the airways.

This is not at all the usual type of interplanetary story, but is a glorious saga of a strange character whose heroic feats won him the nickname, Satan. Watch for this thrilling epic in WEIRD TALES.

The Man Who Could Not Go Home

By L. E. FRAILEY

A grim, human story about the Great War—a story with an unexpected ending

"VERY well, since you must have it," said the young captain, "I will tell you the story, but do not blame me if your dreams are bad tonight."

We were passengers on the New York Central, and for several hours had been talking and smoking. One of us had asked the officer, whose left arm had remained in France, if it didn't seem jolly to be going home, and he had answered that he was journeying a thousand miles out of his way to make good a mysterious promise. This had aroused our curiosity, and, although reluctant to say anything more, the captain had at last consented.

* * * * *

FROM the beginning of our voyage home on the transport *Liberty,* I was curious about the occupant of Stateroom 17—the one to the right of my own. Call it premonition, or what you will, I could not pass the closed door of that room without a strange feeling of fear—an emotion which I had not felt in such measure even while fighting in France. I wondered who the fellow might be, and why he kept to his quarters. You see, the door was always shut. I decided finally that he was one of the more severely wounded officers who could not go on deck.

But Number 17 was not a bed prisoner. That was evident. The first night I heard him pacing up and down his quarters. At times, he played old songs, the sentimental kind, on a singularly sweet violin. Both in the music and the monotony of his walking, there was something that suggested a melancholy mind. Hour after hour he kept going, and as the partition was very thin between us, I felt like asking him to become quiet so that I could go to sleep. But I never did. Maybe I sensed it wouldn't do any good, or maybe I just didn't want to play the bully. I don't know. But I did fall asleep finally, perhaps about midnight. I can't be sure of that.

Toward morning—time for the sun to be coming up, as I understood later—I was half awakened by a commotion in the same room. You know how it is, gentlemen, when you have been sleeping soundly and are not ready to call it a night—how you are vaguely aware that things are going on, and yet so quickly go back to sleep that you are never sure what happened? Well, it was that way with me. I knew that several men were in the room, that they were talking low, and that at last they went out with dragging feet. As they went by my door, one of the men spoke to the others—"He's better off than he was before"—and then I was asleep again. Sure—I know what you are thinking. I should have known. Well, maybe so, but it was all too much like a dream. I thought nothing more about

it until that last night on the ship—the one which I can never forget, and never understand.

Every night I continued to hear the music and the footsteps, but they didn't bother me so much—not until the night before we reached New York. I was sitting in my stateroom, excited at the thought of landing the next day, going over all of the experiences of my two years in France. And then, suddenly and quite terribly, I began to be afraid. I didn't know why. It is a sensation you would have to feel to understand, but I began to tremble and my body was wet with sweat. The thought came to me that more than anything else I wanted to get to bed and bury myself in the blankets. You see, the music of that violin seemed closer than ever before. The fellow was still walking up and down, but each time he stopped on the other side of the partition—he stopped and played *for me!* Maybe you don't understand, but I couldn't stand it. The wild notion came into my head that soon he wouldn't stop—that he would walk right through that wall. I didn't wait to see. I rushed out of my room and up to the deck.

Nerves? Sure, I told myself that. I was ashamed of my funk. I laughed to think how many dangers I had faced in France, only to run away from a fellow officer and his violin. I wondered what he would do if I stopped on the way back to my room and knocked on his door. Why not?

I had about decided to do it, when one of the sailors touched my arm. It startled me a bit, especially when I saw that he was shaking and that his face was pale.

"Look here, my man," I cried to him crossly, "what's up? You look as if you had seen——"

But he wouldn't let me finish. Thrusting a note into my hand, he hurriedly crossed himself and fled across the deck. I never found out who the fellow was, or how he got the note, but you can imagine my astonishment when I discovered that it had been written by the occupant of Number 17. It was a short note, written in a peculiar hand. He wanted to see me—asked if I would mind coming to his quarters. It would only take a few minutes, the writer said, and was of great importance.

I READ the note under one of the ship lamps; then I tossed it to the deck. For a while, I stood wondering if I wanted to go. You can laugh at me, if you wish, but the cold fear which had sent me bolting out of my stateroom had again swept over me. All during the voyage I had been wanting to see the fellow, and there I stood, afraid now that the chance had come. It is all still so unexplainable. Perhaps if it had not been for the package—but then I must stick to my story in the way it happened. You can explain for yourselves the mystery of that room.

The fellow was playing his violin again when I got to his door, but when I knocked, the music stopped immediately, and in a few seconds the door opened. The light in the room was shaded, and at first I could see but little. I did notice, however, that the air seemed unusually cold, and, curiously enough, that there were no covers on the bed. That struck me as queer, but I forgot all about it as gradually there appeared the outlines of a tall figure standing at the other end of the room.

When the man spoke, I noticed that his voice was pleasant but quite unnatural in quality.

"Will you not sit down?" he began. "I thank you very much for coming. One can always count on a marine for a favor, even though the supplicant is a stranger."

By this time my eyes were becoming

more accustomed to the shadows. Imagine my astonishment when I saw that a mask concealed the lower half of the man's face. Of course, as a soldier, I had become more or less indifferent to the unexpected, but the thought of the man meeting me with masked features was so far from my mind that I could not resist a start of surprize. I took a step backward toward the door.

In a second, however, I was ashamed of myself, for the manners of my host were those of a gentleman, and he wore the uniform of a colonel of the infantry. It was absurd that I should have doubted him. I took the stool which he had indicated and, while waiting for him to explain, studied all of his face that was not hidden.

The eyes, just above the mask, were large. The forehead was high. I could imagine that women must have loved his hair, for it was so boyishly curly—just the kind of hair that entwines easily about a woman's fingers. He stood very erect, and in the tight-fitting fatigue blouse he suggested muscular quickness rather than brute strength. Above all, there was something unreal about the man, highly intensified by the dim light, the dull thumping of the engines below, and the insistent beating of the waters against the ship.

My nerves were jumping, and I was glad when he spoke again.

"You are wondering what I want of you and who I am. Is it not so, Captain Thomas?"

"So strange a summons could hardly fail to arouse my curiosity, sir," I answered. "I am content to wait, however, until you are ready to explain."

I fancied that his big eyes were smiling at me for a second or so.

"Part of your curiosity—which is indeed justified—I may satisfy," he said, "but some things are better left untold. Let it be enough that I am a stranger who must take the liberty of asking a great service. Perhaps the fact that we both fought for the same cause, and" (his glance wandered to my empty coat sleeve) "have both suffered for it, is sufficient reason to make me hope you will not refuse my request."

I may have been rash to promise, but I felt keenly the speaker's personality; besides, he was my superior officer. I lost no time in assuring him that he could count on me for any reasonable service.

He was silent for a moment as if seeking the best way to begin. "Captain Thomas, you are looking forward to seeing home again, are you not? May I ask if you intend going there at once?" He put the questions calmly, but his voice had a queer break in it at the mention of the word *home*.

"Just as soon as the train will take me, sir," I replied with enthusiasm. "You might not believe it, but there is a little woman and two kids in Virginia who are mighty anxious to see me—even if I am minus half an arm."

I might have rambled on, but I noticed that my words seemed to hurt the man in the mask. There was a sudden droop to his shoulders, and he turned quickly away, pretending to glance out the open port-hole. I stopped in some confusion, and then, like a fool, made it worse by apologizing.

"I am sorry, sir," I told him, "if I spoke of unpleasant things. I did not know——"

He turned back to me, and I thought I saw an escaping tear run truant-like under the black mask.

"Do not worry; it is nothing," he said. "You are not to blame. Your words, however, brought back to me some very precious memories. It happens that I, too, have a wife and two kids waiting for me."

"Well, that's jolly fine," I interrupted.

"Isn't it great to be out of the trenches—out of them and on the way home?"

"Great enough for you," he cried almost fiercely, "yes, but it is hell for me."

I thought then that I understood why my words about home had pained him.

"Forgive me, sir," I pleaded. "I have unintentionally touched upon a sorrow of yours. You mean that something has happened while you have been away?"

"No, nothing has happened—they are alive and well, thank God. I am the one who is dead."

For a moment I thought he must be insane. He went on rapidly.

"You are going home, Captain Thomas. You will feel again the arms of your wife about you. Your children will cling to you and shout for a good old romp. At night, you will sit among them, and they will listen with big eyes while you tell them about what you did in France. As for your empty sleeve, they will worship you for it, and your children will brag about their soldier daddy to all their playmates. For you there is heaven—for me, nothing! I, too, have a wife and children, but I will never, never see them again. For me no happy reunion, no tiny fingers to cling to my uniform. For me nothing at all but eternal loneliness. Is not a man who can not ever hope to see his friends, his children, his wife—is not such a man one of the dead?"

He had spoken with tremendous passion, and even though I did not understand what he meant I knew that I had just witnessed the overflowing of a man's soul filled to the uttermost with misery.

"I do not want to seem inquisitive," I said soothingly, "and yet—is there some reason why you can not go home?"

The interview had not prepared me for the answer to my question. With a quick step to the light, the man tore off the cloth which had shaded it, and, while I blinked from the new brilliance, he rushed toward me.

"Look," he screamed, "look—have I a reason? Would you want to go home like this?"

May God help me if ever a human being looked at anything more hideous than the face which he thrust within six inches of my own. Describe it I can not. Yet to forget it is impossible. All my life it will live in my memory—that mutilated countenance grinning at me in the stuffy stateroom.

"Take it away!" I shouted. "For God's sake, let me get out of here!"

I MADE for the door, nauseated, trembling. My nerve was gone. I had only one thought—to get out into the open air as quickly as possible.

At the threshold, I shot one terrified glance over my shoulder. Instead of that awful thing, I saw only the mask-covered features of the colonel. He was standing with folded arms and bowed head.

A wave of pity swept over me. I paused, ashamed of my own weakness. While I hesitated, knowing not what to say, he spoke to me in the same precise tones which he had used in the early part of our meeting. Understanding the condition of the lower half of his face, I marveled to note how well he enunciated.

"Sit down again, Captain Thomas," he said kindly, "and forgive me, if you can, for the rude manner in which I have frightened you, At least, you can now agree with me that I never could have gone home. Do not fear that you have offended me. With quite brutal candor, they told me in the French hospital that my wound was the most hideous they had ever seen. If the sight of my poor face so terrified you, a soldier, imagine what the result would have been upon my wife."

I did not argue. In my heart, I knew he was right. I offered one suggestion.

"Couldn't you always wear the mask?" I asked.

"Quite impossible," he responded. "It is a tragedy I would not wish to bring into her life. By now my name has already been reported among the dead. I would rather live in her memory as I once was than live in her presence as I now am."

I remained silent, still sick at what I had beheld.

"That is why I sent for you," he continued. "I want you to go to her. I have a little package. Tell her I gave it to you just before I died. In the package is a medal. It will mean much to her—and some day the children will prize it, too."

He handed me a little box, neatly wrapped in brown paper, and I took it mechanically.

"Make it as easy for her as you can. Tell her I was glad to die for my country and that she must be happy—if only because I wanted her to be."

"But there is no address on the package—I do not know your name——"

"You will find it inside," he interrupted. "It has two wrappers. Please do me the favor not to open the package, or seek to read the address, until you land."

He drew himself to the position of a soldier and looked at me with stern intensity.

"On your honor as a gentleman and an officer," he commanded, "promise me to do what I have asked."

"On my honor, I swear to do it," I cried. "But *you*—what are *you* going to do?"

"That was not difficult to decide," he replied, as he opened the door. "It is a great service you are doing me. Good night."

I did not want to go, but what else could I do? As I passed him, he suddenly held out his hand. His grasp was firm. There were tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat.

"Thomas," he said, "if you see the little ones, kiss them for me."

I nodded, then the door closed behind me. In some way, I found my way back to the upper deck. I felt that I must have fresh air and plenty of it.

It was past eleven o'clock, and most of those on the ship were asleep. Occasionally, the full moon eluded the rushing clouds, and for a few seconds I could see the ugly waves beneath.

I had fallen into a melancholy retrospection, leaning on the rail, when I heard a sudden splash as if something heavy had been thrown into the water. For just a moment, the moon escaped the clouds, and I thought I could make out the body of a man. Was it my imagination, or did I really see, down there staring up at me, the mutilated face of the man in Number 17?

* * * * *

THE young captain hesitated. "Gentlemen," he said nervously, "it has not been easy to tell you this story. The rest I do not expect you to either believe or understand. And yet——"

We gazed at him in mute sympathy, our foreheads wet with sweat.

"Don't stop!" stammered the traveling man who sat huddled in one corner of the smoker. "Tell us what happened to the colonel. Did you actually see him in the water?"

The captain shuddered. "That I do not know," he replied. "I realize now, as I did not then, the significance of many of the incidents in that strange experience. Piece by piece, I can put them together now. So can you. There was that commotion in the room the second morning—and the fellow's remark that he was better off than before. Remember, too,

the sailor who gave me the colonel's note. I told you how he trembled. Those things, I suppose, should have prepared me for what I discovered about that stateroom. But——"

"Well, what did you discover?" I pleaded.

The captain hesitated. I think he feared to end his story, feared that we would not believe him.

"You see," he finally said, "I rushed below and dashed down the passageway. I kicked open the door, but Number 17 was empty. I called the commander. He said that the colonel had died on the second night of our voyage. The door had been locked ever since. The colonel had been buried at sea."

For a moment, probably we all felt that we had been cheated in the telling of the story. At least, the man in the corner laughed. "Oh, so it was only a dream," he said. "There wasn't any man in a mask after all."

"Perhaps you are right," replied the captain slowly, "but do not decide too quickly."

The air in the smoker seemed suddenly to grow damp and thin, and our faces as white as the frosted windows, as the captain extended his hand so that we all could see.

"Maybe a dream," he said, "but there is still a promise for me to keep. You see—here is the package which I must give to the colonel's wife."

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•

Watch for it in WEIRD TALES

An Empty House at Night

By CRISTEL HASTINGS

Quiet enough at noon among its trees
  And weed-grown paths that slumber in the sun,
The empty house seems settled back at ease
  Watching the gray years drift by, one by one.

Here bees may drone and plunder at their will
  In gardens long forgotten—here a bird
May twitter under eaves where all is still
  And somnolent—where never voice is heard.

But let night come!—the old house is *alive*
  With sound and motion with each wind that sighs!
An empty house at night becomes a hive
  Of creeping monsters with a thousand eyes.

Each leaf that falls is like a giant's stride
  Across a roof velvet with moss and mold—
Here settling timbers creak—here dragons hide
  To slither from their attics, queerly bold.

The empty rooms are peopled in the gloom
  With hordes of shapeless, voiceless ghosts that roam
Through doors and windows and from room to room
  Of this lone place that once was known as Home.

Winds weep and wail the long nights through—old doors
  Move back and forth propelled by unseen hands
On hinges long unused—along the floors
  Sly forms may stalk the boards in fearsome bands.

Huge spiders spin their curtains, gray and wide,
  On grimy windows shutting out the light
For fear some passer-by may see inside
  The ghostly things that haunt the place at night.

The Canal*

By EVERIL WORRELL

PAST the sleeping city the river sweeps; along its left bank the old canal creeps.

I did not intend that to be poetry, although the scene is poetic—somberly, gruesomely poetic, like the poems of Poe. Too well I know it—too often have I walked over the grass-grown path beside the reflections of black trees and tumble-down shacks and distant factory chimneys in the sluggish waters that moved so slowly, and ceased to move at all.

I shall be called mad, and I shall be a suicide. I shall take no pains to cover up my trail, or to hide the thing that I shall do. What will it matter, afterward, what they say of me? If they knew the truth—if they could vision, even dimly, the beings with whom I have consorted—if the faintest realization might be theirs of the thing I am becoming, and of the fate from which I am saving their city—then they would call me a great hero. But it does not matter what they call me, as I have said before. Let me write down the things I am about to write down, and let them be taken, as they will be taken, for the last ravings of a madman. The city will be in mourning for the thing I shall have done—but its mourning will be of no consequence beside that other fate from which I shall have saved it.

I HAVE always had a taste for nocturnal prowling. We as a race have grown too intelligent to take seriously any of the old, instinctive fears that preserved us through preceding generations. Our sole remaining salvation, then, has come to be our tendency to travel in herds. We wander at night—but our objective is somewhere on the brightly lighted streets, or still somewhere where men do not go alone. When we travel far afield, it is in company. Few of my acquaintance, few in the whole city here, would care to ramble at midnight over the grass-grown path I have spoken of; not because they would fear to do so, but because such things are not being done.

Well, it is dangerous to differ individually from one's fellows. It is dangerous to wander from the beaten road. And the fears that guarded the race in the dawn of time and through the centuries were real fears, founded on reality.

A month ago, I was a stranger here. I had just taken my first position—I was graduated from college only three months

*From WEIRD TALES for December, 1927.

before, in the spring. I was lonely, and likely to remain so for some time, for I have always been of a solitary nature, making friends slowly.

I had received one invitation out—to visit the camp of a fellow employee in the firm for which I worked, a camp which was located on the farther side of the wide river—the side across from the city and the canal, where the bank was high and steep and heavily wooded, and little tents blossomed all along the water's edge. At night these camps were a string of sparkling lights and tiny, leaping campfires, and the tinkle of music carried faintly far across the calmly flowing water. That far bank of the river was no place for an eccentric, solitary man to love. But the near bank, which would have been an eyesore to the campers had not the river been so wide—the near bank attracted me from my first glimpse of it.

We embarked in a motor-boat at some distance downstream, and swept up along the near bank, and then out and across the current. I turned my eyes backward. The murk of stagnant water that was the canal, the jumble of low buildings beyond it, the lonely, low-lying waste of the narrow strip of land between canal and river, the dark, scattered trees growing there—I intended to see more of these things.

That week-end bored me, but I repaid myself no later than Monday evening, the first evening when I was back in the city, alone and free. I ate a solitary dinner immediately after leaving the office. I went to my room and slept from seven until nearly midnight. I wakened naturally, then, for my whole heart was set on exploring the alluring solitude I had discovered. I dressed, slipped out of the house and into the street, started the motor in my roadster and drove through the lighted streets.

I left behind that part of town which was thick with vehicles carrying people home from their evening engagements, and began to thread my way through darker and narrower streets. Once I had to back out of a cul-de-sac, and once I had to detour around a closed block. This part of town was not alluring, even to me. It was dismal without being solitary.

But when I had parked my car on a rough, cobbled street that ran directly down into the inky waters of the canal, and crossed a narrow bridge, I was repaid. A few minutes set my feet on the old tow-path where mules had drawn river-boats up and down only a year or so ago. Across the canal now, as I walked upstream at a swinging pace, the miserable shacks where miserable people lived seemed to march with me, and then fell behind. They looked like places in which murders might be committed, every one of them.

The bridge I had crossed was near the end of the city going north, as the canal marked its western extremity. Ten minutes of walking, and the dismal shacks were quite a distance behind, the river was farther away and the strip of waste land much wider and more wooded, and tall trees across the canal marched with me as the evil-looking houses had done before. Far and faint, the sound of a bell in the city reached my ears. It was midnight.

I STOPPED, enjoying the desolation around me. It had the savor I had expected and hoped for. I stood for some time looking up at the sky, watching the low drift of heavy clouds, which were visible in the dull reflected glow from distant lights in the heart of the city, so that they appeared to have a lurid phosphorescence of their own. The ground under my feet, on the contrary, was utterly devoid of light. I had felt my way

carefully, knowing the edge of the canal partly by instinct, partly by the even more perfect blackness of the water in it, and even holding fairly well to the path, because it was perceptibly sunken below the ground beside it.

Now as I stood motionless in this spot, my eyes upcast, my mind adrift with strange fancies, suddenly my feelings of satisfaction and well-being gave way to something different. Fear was an emotion unknown to me—for those things which make men fear, I had always loved. A graveyard at night was to me a charming place for a stroll and meditation. But now the roots of my hair seemed to move upright on my head, and along all the length of my spine I was conscious of a prickling, tingling sensation—such as my forefathers may have felt in the jungle when the hair on their backs stood up as the hair of my head was doing now. Also, I was afraid to move; and I knew that there were eyes upon me, and that that was why I was afraid to move. I was afraid of those eyes—afraid to see them, to look into them.

All this while, I stood perfectly still, my face uptilted toward the sky. But after a terrible mental effort, I mastered myself.

Slowly, slowly, with an attempt to propitiate the owner of the unseen eyes by my casual manner, I lowered my own. I looked straight ahead—at the softly swaying silhouette of the tree-tops across the canal as they moved gently in the cool night wind; at the mass of blackness that was those trees, and the opposite shore; at the shiny blackness where the reflections of the clouds glinted vaguely and disappeared, that was the canal. And again I raised my eyes a little, for just across the canal where the shadows massed most heavily, there was that at which I must look more closely. And now, as I grew accustomed to the greater blackness and my pupils expanded, I dimly discerned the contours of an old boat or barge, half sunken in the water. An old, abandoned canal-boat. But was I dreaming, or was there a white-clad figure seated on the roof of the low cabin aft, a pale, heart-shaped face gleaming strangely at me from the darkness, the glow of two eyes seeming to light up the face, and to detach it from the darkness?

Surely, there could be no doubt as to the eyes. They shone as the eyes of animals shine in the dark, with a phosphorescent gleam, and a glimmer of red! Well, I had heard that some human eyes have that quality at night.

But what a place for a human being to be—a girl, too, I was sure. That daintily heart-shaped face was the face of a girl, surely; I was seeing it clearer and clearer, either because my eyes were growing more accustomed to peering into the deeper shadows, or because of that phosphorescence in the eyes that stared back at me.

I RAISED my voice softly, not to break too much the stillness of the night.

"Hello! who's there? Are you lost, or marooned, and can I help?"

There was a little pause. I was conscious of a soft lapping at my feet. A stronger night wind had sprung up, was ruffling the dark waters. I had been overwarm, and where it struck me the perspiration turned cold on my body, so that I shivered uncontrollably.

"You can stay—and talk awhile, if you will. I am lonely, but not lost. I—I live here."

I could hardly believe my ears. The voice was little more than a whisper, but it had carried clearly—a girl's voice, sure enough. And she lived *there*—in an old, abandoned canal-boat, half submerged in the stagnant water.

"You are not *alone* there?"

"No, not alone. My father lives here with me, but he is deaf—and he sleeps soundly."

Did the night wind blow still colder, as though it came to us from some unseen, frozen sea—or was there something in her tone that chilled me, even as a strange attraction drew me toward her? I wanted to draw near to her, to see closely the pale, heart-shaped face, to lose myself in the bright eyes that I had seen shining in the darkness. I wanted—I wanted to hold her in my arms, to find her mouth with mine, to kiss it. . . .

With a start, I realized the nature of my thoughts, and for an instant lost all thought in surprize. Never in my twenty-two years had I felt love before. My fancies had been otherwise directed—a moss-grown, fallen gravestone was a dearer thing to me to contemplate than the fairest face in all the world. Yet, surely, what I felt now was love!

I took a reckless step nearer the edge of the bank.

"Could I come over to you?" I begged. "It's warm, and I don't mind a wetting. It's late, I know—but I would give a great deal to sit beside you and talk, if only for a few minutes before I go back to town. It's a lonely place here for a girl like you to live—your father should not mind if you exchange a few words with someone occasionally."

Was it the unconventionality of my request that made her next words sound like a long-drawn shudder of protest? There was a strangeness in the tones of her voice that held me wondering, every time she spoke.

"No, no. Oh, no! *You must not swim across.*"

"Then—could I come tomorrow, or some day soon, in the daytime; and would you let me come on board then—or would you come on shore and talk to me, perhaps?"

"Not in the daytime—*never* in the daytime!"

Again the intensity of her low-toned negation held me spellbound.

It was not her sense of the impropriety of the hour, then, that had dictated her manner. For surely, any girl with the slightest sense of the fitness of things would rather have a tryst by daytime than after midnight—yet there was an inference in her last words that if I came again it should be again at night.

Still feeling the spell that had enthralled me, as one does not forget the presence of a drug in the air that is stealing one's senses, even when those senses begin to wander and to busy themselves with other things, I yet spoke shortly.

"Why do you say, 'Never in the daytime'? Do you mean that I may come more than this once at night, though now you won't let me cross the canal to you at the expense of my own clothes, and you won't put down your plank or drawbridge or whatever you come on shore with, and talk to me here for only a moment? I'll come again, if you'll let me talk to you instead of calling across the water. I'll come again, any time you will let me—day or night, I don't care. I want to come to you. But I only ask you to explain. If I came in the daytime and met your father, wouldn't that be the best thing to do? Then we could be really acquainted—we could be friends."

"In the nighttime, my father sleeps. In the daytime, *I* sleep. How could I talk to you, or introduce you to my father then? If you came on board this boat in the daytime, you would find my father—and you would be sorry. As for me, I would be sleeping. I could never introduce you to my father, do you see?"

"You sleep soundly, you and your father." Again there was pique in my voice.

"Yes, we sleep soundly."

"And always at different times?"

"Always at different times. We are on guard—one of us is always on guard. We have been hardly used, down there in your city. And we have taken refuge here. And we are always—always—on guard."

The resentment vanished from my breast, and I felt my heart go out to her anew. She was so pale, so pitiful in the night. My eyes were learning better and better how to pierce the darkness; they were giving me a more definite picture of my companion—if I could think of her as a companion, between myself and whom stretched the black water.

The sadness of the lonely scene, the perfection of the solitude itself, these things contributed to her pitifulness. Then there was that strangeness of atmosphere of which, even yet, I had only partly taken note. There was the strange, shivering chill, which yet did not seem like the healthful chill of a cool evening. In fact, it did not prevent me from feeling the oppression of the night, which was unusually sultry. It was like a little breath of deadly cold that came and went, and yet did not alter the temperature of the air itself, as the small ripples on the surface of the water do not concern the water even a foot down.

And even that was not all. There was an unwholesome smell about the night—a dank, moldy smell that might have been the very breath of death and decay. Even I, the connoisseur in all things dismal and unwholesome, tried to keep my mind from dwelling overmuch upon that smell. What it must be to live breathing it constantly in, I could not think. But no doubt the girl and her father were used to it; and no doubt it came from the stagnant water of the canal and from the rotting wood of the old, half-sunken boat that was their refuge.

My heart throbbed with pity again. Their refuge—what a place! And my clearer vision of the girl showed me that she was pitifully thin, even though possessed of the strange face that drew me to her. Her clothes hung around her like old rags, but hers was no scarecrow aspect. Although little flesh clothed her bones, her very bones were beautiful. I was sure the little, pale, heart-shaped face would be more beautiful still, if I could only see it closely. I must see it closely—I must establish some claim to consideration as a friend of the strange, lonely crew of the half-sunken wreck.

"This is a poor place to call a refuge," I said finally. "One might have very little money, and yet do somewhat better. Perhaps I might help you—I am sure I could. If your ill-treatment in the city was because of poverty—I am not rich, but I could help that. I could help you a little with money, if you would let me; or, in any case, I could find a position for you. I'm sure I could do that."

THE eyes that shone fitfully toward me like two small pools of water intermittently lit by a cloud-swept sky seemed to glow more brightly. She had been half crouching, half sitting on top of the cabin; now she leaped to her feet with one quick, sinuous, abrupt motion, and took a few rapid, restless steps to and fro before she answered.

When she spoke, her voice was little more than a whisper; yet surely rage was in its shill sibilance.

"Fool! Do you think you would be helping me, to tie me to a desk, to shut me behind doors, away from freedom, away from the delight of doing my own will, of seeking my own way? Never, never would I let you do that. Rather this old boat, rather a deserted grave under the stars, for my home!"

A boundless surprize swept over me, and a positive feeling of kinship with this strange being, whose face I had hardly

seen, possessed me. So I myself might have spoken, so I had often felt, though I had never dreamed of putting my thoughts so definitely, so forcibly. My regularized daytime life was a thing I thought little of; I really lived only in my nocturnal prowlings. Why, this girl was right! All of life should be free, and spent in places that interested and attracted.

How little, how little I knew, that night, that dread forces were tugging at my soul, were finding entrance to it and easy access through the morbid weakness of my nature! How little I knew at what a cost I deviated so radically from my kind, who herd in cities and love well-lit ways and the sight of man, and sweet and wholesome places to be solitary in, when the desire for solitude comes over them!

That night it seemed to me that there was but one important thing in life—to allay the angry passion my unfortunate words had aroused in the breast of my beloved, and to win from her some answering feeling.

"I understand—much better than you think," I whispered tremulously. "What I want is to see you again, to come to know you, and to serve you in any way that I may. Surely, there must be something in which I can be of use to you. All you have to do from tonight on for ever, is to command me. I swear it!"

"You swear *that*—you do swear it?"

Delighted at the eagerness of her words, I lifted my hand toward the dark heavens.

"I swear it. From this night on, for ever—I swear it."

"Then listen. Tonight you may not come to me, nor I to you. I do not want you to board this boat—not tonight, not any night. And most of all, not any day. But do not look so sad. I will come to you. No, not tonight, perhaps not for many nights—yet before very long. I will come to you there, on the bank of the canal, when the water in the canal ceases to flow."

I must have made a gesture of impatience, or of despair. It sounded like a way of saying "never"—for why should the water in the canal cease to flow? She read my thoughts in some way, for she answered them.

"You do not understand. I am speaking seriously—I am promising to meet you there on the bank, and soon. For the water within these banks is moving slower, always slower. Higher up, I have heard that the canal has been drained. Between these lower locks, the water still seeps in and drops slowly, slowly downstream. But there will come a night when it will be quite, quite stagnant—and on that night I will come to you. And when I come, I will ask of you a favor. And you will keep your oath."

It was all the assurance I could get that night. She had come back to the side of the cabin where she had sat crouched before, and she resumed again that posture and sat still and silent, watching me. Sometimes I could see her eyes upon me, and sometimes not. But I felt that their gaze was unwavering. The little cold breeze, which I had finally forgotten while I was talking with her, was blowing again, and the unwholesome smell of decay grew heavier before the dawn.

She would not speak again, nor answer me when I spoke to her, and I grew nervous, and strangely ill at ease.

At last I went away. And in the first faint light of dawn I slipped up the stairs of my rooming-house, and into my own room.

I was deadly tired at the office next day. And day after day slipped away and I grew more and more weary; for a man can not wake day and night without suffering, especially in hot weather, and that

was what I was doing. I haunted the old tow-path and waited, night after night, on the bank opposite the sunken boat. Sometimes I saw my lady of the darkness, and sometimes not. When I saw her, she spoke little; but sometimes she sat there on the top of the cabin and let me watch her till the dawn, or until the strange uneasiness that was like fright drove me from her and back to my room, where I tossed restlessly in the heat and dreamed strange dreams, half waking, till the sun shone in on my forehead and I tumbled into my clothes and down to the office again.

Once I asked her why she had made the fanciful condition that she would not come ashore to meet me until the waters of the canal had ceased to run. (How eagerly I studied those waters! How I stole away at noontime more than once, not to approach the old boat, but to watch the almost imperceptible downdrift of bubbles, bits of straw, twigs, rubbish!)

My questioning displeased her, and I asked her that no more. It was enough that she chose to be whimsical. My part was to wait.

It was more than a week later that I questioned her again, this time on a different subject. And after that, I curbed my curiosity relentlessly.

"Never speak to me of things you do not understand about me. Never again, or I will not show myself to you again. And when I walk on the path yonder, it will not be with you."

I had asked her what form of persecution she and her father had suffered in the city, that had driven them out to this lonely place, and where in the city they had lived.

Frightened seriously lest I lose the ground I was sure I had gained with her, I was about to speak of something else. But before I could find the words, her low voice came to me again.

"It was horrible, horrible! Those little houses below the bridge, those houses along the canal—tell me, are they not worse than my boat? Life there was shut in, and furtive. I was not free as I am now—and the freedom I will soon have will make me forget the things I have not yet forgotten. The screaming, the reviling and cursing! Fear and flight! As you pass back by those houses, think how you would like to be shut in one of them, and in fear of your life. And then think of them no more; for I would forget them, and I will never speak of them again."

I dared not answer her. I was surprized that she had vouchsafed me so much. But surely her words meant this: that before she had come to live on the decaying, water-rotted old boat, she had lived in one of those horrible houses I passed by on my way to her. Those houses, each of which looked like the predestined scene of a murder!

As I left her that night, I felt that I was very daring.

"One or two nights more and you will walk beside me," I called to her. "I have watched the water at noon, and it hardly moves at all. I threw a scrap of paper into the canal, and it whirled and swung a little where a thin skim of oil lay on the water down there—oil from the big, dirty city you are well out of. But though I watched and watched, I could not see it move downward at all. Perhaps tomorrow night, or the night after, you will walk on the bank with me. I hope it will be clear and moonlight, and I will be near enough to see you clearly—as well as you seem always to see me in darkness or moonlight, equally well. And perhaps I will kiss you—but not unless you let me."

And yet, the next day, for the first time my thoughts were definitely troubled. I had been living in a dream—I

began to speculate concerning the end of the path on which my feet were set.

I had conceived, from the first, such a horror of those old houses by the canal! They were well enough to walk past, nursing gruesome thoughts for a midnight treat. But, much as I loved all that was weird and eery about the girl I was wooing so strangely, it was a little too much for my fancy that she had come from them.

By this time, I had become decidedly unpopular in my place of business. Not that I had made enemies, but that my peculiar ways had caused too much adverse comment. It would have taken very little, I think, to have made the entire office force decide that I was mad. After the events of the next twenty-four hours, and after this letter is found and read, they will be sure that they knew it all along! At this time, however, they were punctiliously polite to me, and merely let me alone as much as possible —which suited me perfectly. I dragged wearily through day after day, exhausted from lack of sleep, conscious of their speculative glances, living only for the night to come.

But on this day, I approached the man who had invited me to the camp across the river, who had unknowingly shown me the way that led to my love.

"Have you ever noticed the row of tumble-down houses along the canal on the city side?" I asked him.

He gave me an odd look. I suppose he sensed the significance of my breaking silence after so long to speak of *them* —sensed that in some way I had a deep interest in them.

"You have odd tastes, Morton," he said after a moment. "I suppose you wander into strange places sometimes—I've heard you speak of an enthusiasm for graveyards at night. But my advice to you is to keep away from those houses. They're unsavory, and their reputation is unsavory. Positively, I think you'd be in danger of your life, if you go poking around there. They have been the scene of several murders, and a dope den or two has been cleaned out of them. Why in the world you should want to investigate them——"

"I don't expect to investigate them," I said testily. "I was merely interested in them—from the outside. To tell you the truth, I'd heard a story, a rumor—never mind where. But you say there have been murders there—I suppose this rumor I heard may have had to do with an attempted one. There was a girl who lived there with her father once, and they were set upon there, or something of the sort, and had to run away. Did you ever hear *that* story?"

Barrett gave me an odd look such as one gives in speaking of a past horror so dreadful that the mere speaking of it makes it live terribly again.

"What you say reminds me of a horrible thing that was said to have happened down there once," he said. "It was in all the papers. A little child disappeared in one of those houses, and a couple of poor lodgers who lived there, a girl and her father, were accused of having made away with it. They were accused—they were accused—oh, well, I don't like to talk about such things. It was too dreadful. The child's body was found—*part* of it was found. It was mutilated, and the people in the house seemed to believe it had been mutilated in order to conceal the manner of its death; there was an ugly wound in the throat, it finally came out, and it seemed as if the child might have been bled to death. It was found in the girl's room, hidden away. The old man and his daughter escaped, before the police were called. The countryside was scoured, but

they were never found. Why, you must have read it in the papers, several years ago."

I nodded, with a heavy heart. I *had* read it in the papers, I remembered now. And again, a terrible questioning came over me. Who was this girl, *what* was this girl, who seemed to have my heart in her keeping?

Why did not a merciful God let me die then?

Befogged with exhaustion, bemused in a dire enchantment, my mind was incapable of thought. And yet, some soul-process akin to that which saves the sleepwalker poised at perilous heights sounded its warning now.

My mind was filled with doleful images. There were women—I had heard and read—who slew to satisfy a blood-lust. There were ghosts, specters—call them what you will, their names have been legion in the dark pages of that lore which dates back to the infancy of the races of the earth—who retained even in death this blood-lust. Vampires—they had been called that. I had read of them. Corpses by day, spirits of evil by night, roaming abroad in their own forms or in the forms of bats or unclean beasts, killing body and soul of their victims—for whoever dies of the repeated "kiss" of the vampire, which leaves its mark on the throat and draws the blood from the body, becomes a vampire also—of such beings I had read.

And, horror of horrors! In that last cursed day at the office, I remembered reading of these vampires—these undead—that in their nocturnal flights they had one limitation—*they could not cross running water.*

THAT night I went my usual nightly way with tears of weakness on my face—for my weakness was supreme, and I recognized fully at last the misery of being the victim of an enchantment stronger than my feeble will. But I went.

I approached the neighborhood of the canal-boat as the distant city clock chimed the first stroke of twelve. It was the dark of the moon and the sky was overcast. Heat-lightning flickered low in the sky, seeming to come from every point of the compass and circumscribe the horizon, as if unseen fires burned behind the rim of the world. By its fitful glimmer, I saw a new thing: between the old boat and the canal bank stretched a long, slim, solid-looking shadow—a plank had been let down! In that moment, I realized that I had been playing with powers of evil which had no intent now to let me go, which were indeed about to lay hold upon me with an inexorable grasp. Why had I come tonight? Why, but that the spell of the enchantment laid upon me was a thing more potent, and far more unbreakable, than any wholesome spell of love? The creature I sought out—oh, I remembered now, with the cold perspiration beading my brow, the lore hidden away between the covers of the dark old book which I had read so many years ago and half forgotten!—until dim memories of it stirred within me, this last day and night.

My lady of the night! No woman of wholesome flesh and blood and odd perverted tastes that matched my own, but one of the undead! In that moment, I knew it, and knew that the vampires of old legends polluted still, in these latter days, the fair surface of the earth.

And on the instant, behind me in the darkness there was the crackle of a twig, and something brushed against my arm.

This, then, was the fulfilment of my dream. I knew, without turning my head, that the pale, dainty face with its glowing eyes was near my own—that I had

(Please turn to page 518)

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(Continued from page 516)

only to stretch out my arm to touch the slender grace of the girl I had so longed to draw near. I knew, and should have felt the rapture I had anticipated. Instead, the roots of my hair prickled coldly, unendurably, as they had on the night when I had first sighted the old boat. The miasmic odors of the night, heavy and oppressive with heat and unrelieved by a breath of air, all but overcame me, and I fought with myself to prevent my teeth clicking in my head. The little waves of coldness I had felt often in this spot were chasing over my body, yet they were not from any breeze; the leaves on the trees hung down motionless, as though they were actually wilting on their branches.

With an effort, I turned my head.

Two hands caught me around my neck. The pale face was so near that I felt the warm breath from its nostrils fanning my cheek.

And, suddenly, all that was wholesome in my perverted nature rose uppermost. I longed for the touch of the red mouth, like a dark flower opening before me in the night. I longed for it—and yet more I dreaded it. I shrank back, catching in a powerful grip the fragile wrists of the hands that strove to hold me. I must not —I must not yield to the faintness that I felt stealing over me.

I was facing down the path toward the city. A low rumble of thunder—the first —broke the torrid hush of the summer night. A glare of lightning seemed to tear the night asunder, to light up the universe. Overhead, the clouds were careering madly in fantastic shapes, driven by a wind that swept the upper heavens without causing even a trembling in the air lower down. And far down the canal, that baleful glare seemed to play around and hover over the little row of shanties —murder-cursed, and haunted by the ghost of a dead child.

My gaze was fixed on them, while I held away from me the pallid face and fought off the embrace that sought to overcome my resisting will. And so a long moment passed. The glare faded out of the sky, and a greater darkness took the world. But there was a near, more menacing glare fastened upon my face—the glare of two eyes that watched mine, that had watched me as I, unthinking, stared down at the dark houses.

This girl—this woman who had come to me at my own importunate requests, did not love me, since I had shrunk from her. She did not love me—but it was not only that. She had watched me as I gazed down at the houses that held her dark past, and I was sure that she divined my thoughts. She knew my horror of those houses—she knew my new-born horror of *her*. And she hated me for it, hated me more malignantly than I had believed a human being could hate.

And at that point in my thoughts, I felt my skin prickle and my scalp rise again: could a *human being* cherish such hatred as I read, trembling more and more, in those glowing fires lit with what seemed to me more like the fires of hell than any light that ought to shine in a woman's eyes?

And through all this, not a word had passed between us!

SO FAR I have written calmly. I wish that I could write on so, to the end. If I could do that, there might be one or two of those who will regard this as the document of a maniac, who would believe the horrors of which I am about to write.

But I am only flesh and blood. At this point in the happenings of the awful night, my calmness deserted me—at this point I felt that I had been drawn into the midst of a horrible nightmare from which there was no escape, no waking!

As I write, this feeling again overwhelms me, until I can hardly write at all—until, were it not for the thing which I must do, I would rush out into the street and run, screaming, until I was caught and dragged away, to be put behind strong iron bars. Perhaps I would feel safe there—perhaps!

I know that, terrified at the hate I saw confronting me in those redly gleaming eyes, I would have slunk away. The two thin hands that caught my arm again were strong enough to prevent that, however. I had been spared her kiss, but I was not to escape from the oath I had taken to serve her.

"You promised, you swore," she hissed in my ear. "And tonight you are to keep your oath."

I felt my senses reel. My oath—yes, I had an oath to keep. I had lifted my hand toward the dark heavens, and sworn to serve her in any way she chose. Freely, and of my own volition, I had sworn.

I sought to evade her.

"Let me help you back to your boat," I begged. "You have no kindly feeling for me, and—you have seen it—I love you no longer. I will go back to the city—you can go back to your father, and forget that I broke your peace."

The laughter that greeted my speech I shall never forget—not in the depths under the scummy surface of the canal—not in the empty places between the worlds, where my tortured soul may wander.

"So you do not love me, and I hate you! Fool! Have I waited these weary months for the water to stop, only to go back now? After my father and I returned here and found the old boat rotting in the drained canal, and took refuge in it; when the water was turned into the canal while I slept, so that I could never escape until its flow should cease, *because*

NEXT MONTH

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of the thing that I am—even then I dreamed of tonight.

"When the imprisonment we still shared ceased to matter to my father—come on board the deserted boat tomorrow, and see why, if you dare!—still I dreamed on, of tonight!

"I have been lonely, desolate, starving—now the whole world shall be mine! And by *your* help!"

I asked her, somehow, what she wanted of me, and a madness overcame me so that I hardly heard her reply. Yet somehow, I knew that there was that on the opposite shore of the great river where the pleasure camps were, that she wanted to find. In the madness of my terror, she made me understand and obey her. I must carry her in my arms across the long bridge over the river, deserted in the small hours of the night.

The way back to the city was long tonight—long. She walked behind me, and I turned my eyes neither to right nor left. Only as I passed the tumble-down houses, I saw their reflection in the canal and trembled so that I could have fallen to the ground, at the thoughts of the little child this woman had been accused of slaying there, and at the certainty I felt that she was reading my thoughts.

And now the horror that engulfed me darkened my brain.

I know that we set our feet upon the long, wide bridge that spanned the river. I know the storm broke there, so that I battled for my footing, almost for my life, it seemed, against the pelting deluge. And the horror I had invoked was in my arms, clinging to me, burying its head upon my shoulder. So increasingly dreadful had my pale-faced companion become to me, that I hardly thought of her now as a woman at all—only as a demon of the night.

The tempest raged still as she leaped down out of my arms on the other shore. And again I walked with her against my will, while the trees lashed their branches around me, showing the pale under-sides of their leaves in the vivid frequent flashes that rent the heavens.

On and on we went, branches flying through the air and missing us by a miracle of ill fortune. Such as she and I are not slain by falling branches. The river was a welter of whitecaps, flattened down into strange shapes by the pounding rain. The clouds as we glimpsed them were like devils flying through the sky.

Past dark tent after dark tent we stole, and past a few where lights burned dimly behind their canvas walls. And at last we came to an old quarry. Into its artificial ravine she led me, and up to a crevice in the rock wall.

"Reach in your hand and pull out the loose stone you will feel," she whispered. "It closes an opening that leads into deep caverns. A human hand must remove that stone—your hand must move it!"

Why did I struggle so to disobey her? Why did I fail? It was as though I *knew*—but my failure was foreordained—I had taken oath!

If you who read have believed that I have set down the truth thus far, the little that is left you will call the ravings of a madman overtaken by his madness. Yet these things happened.

I stretched out my arm, driven by a compulsion I could not resist. At arm's length in the niche in the rock, I felt something move—the loose rock, a long, narrow fragment, much larger than I had expected. Yet it moved easily, seeming to swing on a natural pivot. Outward it swung, toppling toward me—a moment more and there was a swift rush of the ponderous weight I had loosened. I leaped aside and went down, my forehead grazed by the rock.

For a brief moment I must have been

unconscious, but only for a moment. My head a stabbing agony of pain, unreal lights flashing before my eyes, I yet knew the reality of the storm that beat me down as I struggled to my feet. I knew the reality of the dark, loathsome shapes that passed me in the dark, crawling out of the orifice in the rock and flapping through the wild night, along the way that led to the pleasure camps.

So the caverns I had laid open to the outer world were infested with bats. I had been inside unlit caverns, and had heard there the squeaking of the things, felt and heard the flapping of their wings —*but never in all my life before had I seen bats as large as men and women!*

Sick and dizzy from the blow on my head, and from disgust, I crept along the way they were going. If I touched one of them, I felt that I should die of horror.

Now, at last, the storm abated, and a heavy darkness made the whole world seem like the inside of a tomb.

Where the tents stood in a long row, the number of the monster bats seemed to diminish. It was as though—horrible thought!—they were creeping into the tents, with their slumbering occupants.

At last I came to a lighted tent, and paused, crouching so that the dim radiance which shone through the canvas did not touch me in the shadows. And there I waited, but not for long. There was a dark form silhouetted against the tent; a rustle and confusion, and the dark thing was again in silhouette—but with a difference in the quality of the shadow. The dark thing was *inside* the tent now, its bat wings extending across the entrance through which it had crept.

Fear held me spellbound. And as I looked, the shadow changed again, imperceptibly, so that I could not have told *how* it changed. But now it was not the shadow of a bat, but of a woman.

"The storm, the storm! I am lost, ex-

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hausted! I crept in here, to beg for refuge until the dawn!"

That low, thrilling, sibilant voice—too well I knew it!

Within the tent I heard a murmur of acquiescent voices. At last I began to understand.

I knew the nature of the woman I had carried over the river in my arms, the woman who would not even cross the canal until the water should have ceased utterly to flow. I remembered books I had read—*Dracula*—other books, and stories. I knew they were true books and stories, now—I knew those horrors existed for me.

I had indeed kept my oath to the creature of darkness—I had brought her to her kind, under her guidance. I had let them loose in hordes upon the pleasure camps. The campers were doomed—and through them, others. . . .

I forgot my fear. I rushed from my hiding-place up to the tent door, and there I screamed and called aloud.

"Don't take her in—don't let her stay—nor the others, that have crept into the other tents! Wake all the campers—they will sleep on to their destruction! Drive out the interlopers—drive them out quickly! *They are not human—no, and they are not bats!* Do you hear me?—do you understand?"

I was fairly howling, in a voice that was strange to me.

"She is a vampire—they are all vampires. *Vampires!*"

Inside the tent I heard a new voice.

"What can be the matter with that poor man?" the voice said. It was a woman's, and gentle.

"Crazy—somebody out of his senses, dear," a man's voice answered. "Don't be frightened."

And then the voice I knew so well—so well: "I saw a falling rock strike a man on the head in the storm. He staggered away, but I suppose it crazed him."

I waited for no more. I ran away, madly, through the night and back across the bridge to the city.

Next day—today—I boarded the sunken canal-boat. It is the abode of death—no woman could have lived there—only such an one as *she*. The old man's corpse was there—he must have died long, long ago. The smell of death and decay on the boat was dreadful.

Again, I felt that I understood. Back in those awful houses, she had committed the crime when first she became the thing she is. And he—her father—less sin-steeped, and less accursed, attempted to destroy the evidence of her crime, and fled with her, but died without becoming like her. She had said that one of those two was always on watch—did he indeed divide her vigil on the boat? What more fitting—the dead standing watch with the undead! And no wonder that she would not let me board the craft of death, even to carry her away.

And still I feel the old compulsion. I have been spared her kiss—but for a little while. Yet I will not let the power of my oath draw me back, till I enter the caverns with her and creep forth in the form of a bat to prey upon mankind. Before that can happen, I too will die.

TODAY in the city I heard that a horde of strange insects or small animals infested the pleasure camps last night. Some said, with horror-bated breath, that they perhaps were rats. None of them was seen; but in the morning nearly every camper had a strange, deep wound in his throat. I almost laughed aloud. They were so horrified at the idea of an army of rats, creeping into the tents and biting the sleeping occupants on their throats! If they had seen what I saw—if they knew that they are doomed to spread corruption——

So my own death will not be enough. Today I bought supplies for blasting. Tonight I will set my train of dynamite, from the hole I made in the cliff where the vampires creep in and out, along the row of tents, as far as the last one—then I shall light my fuse. It will be done before the dawn. Tomorrow, the city will mourn its dead and execrate my name.

And then, at last, in the slime beneath the unmoving waters of the canal, I shall find peace! But perhaps it will not be peace—for I shall seek it midway between the old boat with its cargo of death and the row of dismal houses where a little child was done to death when first *she* became the thing she is. That is my expiation.

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WE ARE gratified indeed to learn from the editors of two fan magazines—*Fantasy Magazine* and *The Fantasy Fan*—that they are dedicating their current issues to WEIRD TALES. These two little magazines serve as mediums in which lovers of fantastic and weird fiction exchange views. *The Fantasy Fan* is edited by Charles D. Hornig, and *Fantasy Magazine* (formerly called *Science Fiction Digest)* is edited by Julius Schwartz. Editor Schwartz informs us that a free copy of *Fantasy Magazine* will be mailed to any reader of WEIRD TALES who sends in a post card requesting it. Address your post card to *Fantasy Magazine,* in care of WEIRD TALES; and your request will be immediately forwarded to Mr. Schwartz.

A Bathroom Gallery of Art

Alden Moras, of Long Beach, California, writes to the Eyrie: "I wish to commend you on your very interesting magazine. I have been reading it for about six years, and have never been bored by it. The outstanding story in all this time was C. L. Moore's *Shambleau.* None of his other tales have equaled this. Please give us more of Doctor de Grandin. His mysticism is interesting, and also true to fact in ancient religions—I have traced some of it back to find out. Please do not discontinue Brundage's nude covers. They may stir up controversies, but they are beautiful and weird. I have made a gallery of them on our bathroom walls."

Our Fifteen Best Stories

Charles H. Bert, of Philadelphia, writes: "In the February WEIRD TALES, B. M. Reynolds of North Adams, Massachusetts, wants to know which are the twelve best stories you've published. I have made a list of the fifteen best, and answered that question to my own satisfaction. By best stories, I mean the finest stories in their respective field, including originality of plot, story interest, suspense, action, and so forth; in fact, everything that helps to make a masterpiece. They are as follows: the best ghost story was *The Ghosts of Steamboat Coulee* by Arthur J. Burks (May 1926); the strangest and most outré story, that vivid masterpiece, *The Outsider* by H. P. Lovecraft (April 1926); the best spider story was *Spider-Bite* by Robert S. Carr (June 1926); the best werewolf story, *The Phantom Farmhouse* by Seabury Quinn (Oct. 1923); the best witchcraft story, *The Supreme Witch* by G. Appleby Terrill (Oct. 1926)—this was recently republished. Your best voodoo story was *Black Medicine* by Arthur J. Burks (Aug. 1925); the best Aztec sacrifice tale, *Teoquitla the Golden* by Ramon de las Cuevas (Nov. 1924); the best science-fiction story, *When the Green Star Waned* by Nictzin Dyalhis (April 1925); the most different story, *The Woman of the Wood* by A. Merritt (Aug. 1926); the best devil-worship story, *The Stranger From Kurdistan* by E. Hoffmann Price (July 1925); and the finest oriental story, *The Wind that Tramps the World* by Frank Owen (April 1925). The best torture story was *The Oldest Story in the World* by Murray Leinster (Aug. 1925); the finest atavistic tale of ancestral throwback, *The Rats in the Walls* by H. P. Lovecraft (March 1924); the best vampire story, *The Canal* by Everil Worrell (Dec. 1927); and the best necrophilic story was *The Loved Dead* by C. M. Eddy, Jr. (May 1924). The most recent masterpieces are *Shambleau, They Called Him Ghost,* and *The House of the Worm.* The best stories in the February issue are, in order of merit, *The Fireplace* by Whitehead and *The Body-Masters* by Long."

A List of Twelve

Henry Hasse, of Indianapolis, writes: "I was glad to see the new interior artists in the February issue. Napoli especially is good. I hope you continue to use him, but don't discontinue Rankin, either. B. M. Reynolds made a good suggestion, that of a vote on the twelve best stories to be used as reprints. In submitting my twelve reprint selections, I have chosen no stories this side of 1928; I have chosen only such stories as are of proper length to be reprinted; I have chosen stories that represent a miscellany of themes; in short, I have given much thought to the selection of these twelve stories. Not all of them are my own prime favorites, but each of them is weird, and written with literary polish; no science-fiction stories among them. I submit these twelve choice stories, 1923 to 1928: March 1923: *Hark! The Rattle!* by Joel Townsley Rogers (the particular style in which this story is written is a delight). April 1923: *The Parlor Cemetery* by C. E. Howard (humor! WT could do well with a little). April 1923: *A Square of Canvas* by Anthony Rud (as a study of a madman this story has never been surpassed; tremendous climax). May 1923: *Feline* by Bruce Grant (a whimsical storiette). January 1924: *The Picture in the House* by Lovecraft (I have often wondered why you reprinted so many of Lovecraft's and neglected this one, which is absolutely the best horror story H. P. L. ever penned). November 1924: *The Desert Lich* by Frank B. Long, Jr. (why not?). November 1925: *Lukundoo* by Edward Lucas White (you know this one). February 1926: *The Kidnaper's Story* by Walter G. Detrick (read this one again before deciding on it). November 1926: *The Ode to Pegasus* by Maria Moravsky (a dream tale). December 1927: *The Canal* by Everil Worrell (I think you promised this). March 1928: *The Eighth Green Man* by G. G. Pendarves (other readers have asked for this). April 1928: *The Chain* by H. Warner Munn; and December 1928: *The Copper Bowl* by George Fielding Eliot (use either one of these as the best torture story). I think the above stories represent everything the readers expect in a weird tale. You are still printing excellent stories. In 1947 I will again send you a list of twelve stories for reprints, and three will be from 1934. (None yet from 1935, in the single issue I have read). For a

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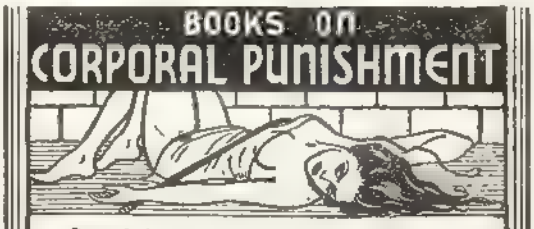

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long time I have wondered about W. C. Morrow. You have reprinted four of his stories. Where did they come from? Morrow didn't appear originally in WT, and I had never heard of him until I saw these WT reprints. I have been unable to find any more of his stories in the libraries. Has W. C. Morrow written other weird tales? If so, by all means reprint them all, interspersing them with the other reprints." [The late W. C. Morrow was a Superior Court judge in San Francisco. He wrote many stories, which appeared in *The Argonaut* and other publications. Some of these were weird stories, but not all of them. A number of his stories were collected into a volume, now out of print, entitled *The Ape, the Idiot, and Other People*.—THE EDITOR.]

Are Our Covers Too Sexy?

Jack Darrow, of Chicago, writes: "Just a word about the covers. First let me repeat so long as the covers are weird I don't care if the females are clad or unclad. I believe that the cover scenes should be picked because they are weird. In looking back over WEIRD TALES for a year and a half I have come to the conclusion that the covers are not picked because they are weird, but because the scene happens to have a nude or a near nude in it. In other words, you are trying to attract new readers with nudes and sexy covers, fooling the buyer into believing that it is an entirely different magazine from what it really is. (These may be harsh statements, but they are made only after careful research and are meant only as constructive criticism.) This policy will not bring new permanent readers. Only those who are attracted to the covers because they are weird are likely to become new readers." [Believe it or not, there is not a woman on the cover of this issue, and there will not be one on next month's cover either.—THE EDITOR.]

About Our Poetry

Edmond L. Beaird, of St. Louis, writes: "It seems to me that in the hubbub about interplanetary stories, and nudes on the covers, a lot of literary gems of smaller caliber than the majority of the stories printed by WT are being overlooked. I refer to a classic short story by Mary E. Counselman, *The Three Marked Pennies*. That was one of the most perfect, enthralling 'shorts' it has ever been my good fortune to read, and scarcely a word about it in the Eyrie! Oh, well, maybe it is just a matter of opinion. And the other thing I have in mind is a poem, the equal of which has not been seen in WT since Clark Ashton Smith's *The Saturnienne*. I mean the gripping contribution by Robert Nelson, *Sable Revery*. I don't remember ever seeing his name before in WT, but if all his work is like *Sable Revery* I hope he becomes a regular contributor. *Candles*, by Dorothy Quick, was another fine piece of verse. It was most unusual—a sordid theme obscured by a veil of exquisite pastel word-painting. Can it be that the readers of WT are unappreciative of such excellence? I hope not. I hate to imagine I am the only one who enjoyed Nelson's and Miss Quick's efforts."

Mysterious Atmosphere Lost

Paul Brown of Washington, D. C., writes: "I have been a constant reader of WEIRD TALES for a long time, and I have always enjoyed the fine and unusual stories in it. For the past few issues, however, I have noticed something incomplete in the magazine; and it was not until a few days ago by looking at some back issues that I discovered what was missing. As I turned the pages to the table of contents for July 1928, I noticed a strange and peculiar man and a funny, weird little woman with a monkey on her back standing under the moon. A few more pages and the title, *The Witches' Sabbath*, in letters that appeared drawn rather than printed, and underneath a misty, exotic illustration by Hugh Rankin imparted a 'spooky' air. Then I looked at the February 1935 issue. None of those delightful little touches were there. The illustrations were bold, harsh outline, and had none of that vague, intangible feeling of the Rankin drawings; and the titles were stiff, unromantic type. The magazine had somehow lost some of the mysterious atmosphere that it once had. The stories still retain the same standard of excellence, but I think WEIRD TALES has somehow lost that little extra touch that puts one in the proper mood for its particular type of literature."

About Our Artists

Dwight A. Boyce, of Ludlow, Massachusetts, writes: "Congratulations, WEIRD TALES, on your new illustrator. The facile pen technique of Napoli is a joy to the eye

and is far ahead of the general run of artwork appearing in any other fantasy magazine. The artist who did the drawing for Frank Belknap Long's story deserves praise too; his work shows a clean clear-cut style that reproduces well. [This artist is Rodney McCord Ruth, of Chicago.—THE EDITOR.] Incidentally, how about a credit line for your artists? They merit whatever attention they can get. I was somewhat disappointed in Hammond's illustration for Paul Ernst's story. Ernst's description of the monster-god in the pool was depicted in vivid detail—the ten-foot curved 'parrot beak'; the great, dead, expressionless, coldly ferocious disks of eyes; the two-foot hawsers of gristle that are the tentacles, the leprous and oily sheen to the sac, twenty feet in diameter. Hammond's conception, I feel, was rather anemic. And why, for Pete's sake, did he draw the three men in the nude, when Ernst states that Ticknor, hoping to destroy the monster, 'fumbled swiftly in his pocket, drew out a tiny object, and began anxiously to try to dry it on his dripping coat-sleeve'? And again, *after* the tussle with the overgrown octopus, 'We took off our tattered, ripped coats, and our shoes.' Hammond draws the human figure well; so perhaps he is not to be censured too much for depicting nude figures when and where he can, but sometimes the effect is rather ridiculous. . . . Perhaps I am too critical of my fellow artists. But I do demand a reasonable amount of accuracy and atmospheric detail in illustrations. . . . And while I am in a critical mood, can't we have some *weird* covers? This steady diet of seductive females is rather ill-balanced fare. Mrs. Brundage handles color beautifully and has a fine sense of design; her January cover was excellent. But a course in anatomy drawing seems to be indicated, for the Brundage figures are not always well proportioned—too much in one place, and not enough in another, etc. And I heartily agree with the contributor to the Eyrie who wished for a 'sad-looking spook, sitting on the edge of an empty grave', for a change. While Mrs. Brundage is busy taking her anatomy course, sandwich in a few spooks, ghouls, vampires, exotic monsters and grinning skulls, will you?"

False Prophets?

Ernest M. Smola, of New York City, writes: "Sad story, mates, sad. No raspberry

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to the editor, owing to the excellent general tenor of WT. However, the *Body-Masters* tale of your February issue is decidedly out of place—what with insipid glandular behaviorism, absurdly pictured surgery (irreparably slicing off a piece of any gland alleged to function to excess), and robots that haven't got a leg to stand on. Why can't futuristic writers ascertain man's true make-up first (a study of theosophy will do in a pinch, as merely one source of information), or else read Francis Bacon's last manuscript, *The New Atlantis*—there is a story for you and a prophecy. Meantime, how could you, Mr. Editor, how could you humor false prophets?"

The February Cover

Doctor LeRoy C. Bashore, of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, writes: "How rapidly WEIRD TALES has taken the lead in its field! The February issue is superb, and I enjoyed it immensely. The cover painting is magnificent. It shows up very well, the nudes look as if they were alive. Mrs. Brundage knows her stuff. Her cover paintings are O. K. and should not be objected to. Keep her, by all means. *The Web of Living Death,* by your great author, Seabury Quinn, was very good. . . . The story had both a splendid beginning and a splendid ending. It was well written, and very interesting. This story takes first place, in my opinion. *The Grisly Horror* by Robert E. Howard was excellent. It had a good background and was very interesting. It held you in suspense all through the story, and ended well. . . . *Murder in the Grave* by Edmond Hamilton was something new in stories. It had a very good plot and was very thrilling. The second part of Paul Ernst's scientific story, *Rulers of the Future,* is a masterpiece, and I can hardly wait until the third and last installment is published. By the way, is Seabury Quinn his right name?" [Yes, Seabury Quinn is the real name of a real person. When Mr. Quinn first wrote magazine stories he used his full name, Seabury Grandin Quinn. It was his middle name that suggested the character of Jules de Grandin to him. Mr. Quinn is a descendant of the first Anglican bishop in the colonies, Bishop Seabury, for whom he was named.—THE EDITOR.]

Your Favorite Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue of WEIRD TALES? Write a letter to the Eyrie, or fill out the coupon on this page and send it to us. This will help us to know the type of stories that you want to see in the magazine. Your votes for the most popular story in the February issue were divided between *The Web of Living Death* by Seabury Quinn, and part 2 of Paul Ernst's weird-scientific story, *Rulers of the Future.*

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE APRIL WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
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I do not like the following stories:

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COMING NEXT MONTH

NO SOUND came from the black woods, invisible beyond the overhanging bushes. Balthus no longer heard the drums. They had been silent for hours. He kept blinking, unconsciously trying to see through the deep gloom. The dank night-smells of the river and the damp forest oppressed him. Somewhere, near by, there was a sound as if a big fish had flopped and splashed the water. Balthus thought it must have leaped so close to the canoe that it had struck the side, for a slight quiver vibrated the craft. The boat's stern began to swing slightly away from the shore. The man behind him must have let go of the projection he was gripping. Balthus twisted his head to hiss a warning, and could just make out the figure of his companion, a slightly blacker bulk in the blackness.

The man did not reply. Wondering if he had fallen asleep, Balthus reached out and grasped his shoulder. To his amazement, the man crumpled under his touch and slumped down in the canoe. Twisting his body half about, Balthus groped for him, his heart shooting into his throat. His fumbling fingers slid over the man's throat—only the youth's convulsive clenching of his jaws choked back that cry that rose to his lips. His fingers encountered a gaping, oozing wound—his companion's throat had been cut from ear to ear.

In that instant of horror and panic Balthus started up—and then a muscular arm out of the darkness locked fiercely about his throat, strangling his yell. The canoe rocked wildly. Balthus' knife was in his hand, though he did not remember jerking it out of his boot, and he stabbed fiercely and blindly. He felt the blade sink deep, and a fiendish yell rang in his ear, a yell that was horribly answered. The darkness seemed to come to life about him. A bestial clamor rose on all sides, and other arms grappled him. Borne under a mass of hurtling bodies the canoe rolled sidewise, but before he went under with it, something cracked against Balthus' head and the night was briefly illuminated by a blinding burst of fire before it gave way to a blackness where not even stars shone. . . .

This thrilling weird saga of terrific adventures and dark magic will begin in next month's WEIRD TALES:

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By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A bizarre fantasy, about a race of vampiric flowers and an alien sorcerer on a far world warmed by three suns.

THE BRONZE CASKET

By RICHARD H. HART

A strange tale of the Wandering Jew, and the weird experiences of an American art student who was stranded in Paris.

May Weird Tales . . . Out May 1

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"Communicate this to the various governments of the earth:

"As a preliminary to the establishment of my sole rule throughout the world, the following demands must be complied with:

"First: All standing armies shall be disbanded, and every implement of warfare, of whatsoever nature, destroyed.

"Second: All war vessels shall be assembled—those of the Atlantic fleets midway between New York and Gibraltar, those of the Pacific fleets midway between San Francisco and Honolulu—and sunk.

"Third: One-half of all the monetary gold supply of the world shall be collected and turned over to my agents at places to be announced later.

"Fourth: At noon on the third day after the foregoing demands have been complied with, all existing governments shall resign and surrender their powers to my agents, who will be on hand to receive them.

"In my next communication I will fix the date for the fulfillment of these demands.

"The alternative is the destruction of the globe.

"KWO"

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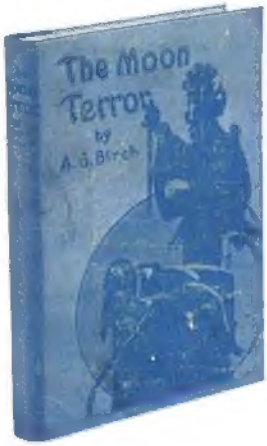

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